WAR of KINGS
MARVEL

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UNCANNY X-MEN #475-486

WRITER: Ed Brubaker

ISSUES #475-476 & #486:
PENCILER: Billy Tan
INKER: Danny Miki
COVER ART: Billy Tan, Danny Miki & Frank D'Armata (*#475-476*), John Watson (*#486*)

ISSUES #477, #480 & #483:
PENCILER: Clayton Henry
INKER: Mark Morales
COVER ART: John Watson

ISSUES #478-479, #481-482 & #484-485:
PENCILER: Billy Tan
INKERS: Danny Miki & Allen Martinez
COVER ART: Billy Tan, Danny Miki, Allen Martinez & Frank D'Armata

COLORISTS: Frank D'Armata (*#475-476 & #478-486*) & Wil Quintana (*#477*)
LETTERERS: Chris Eliopoulos (*#475-478 & #485-486*) & VC's Joe Caramagna (*#479-485*)
Special Thanks to Pond Scum & Rich Ginter

X-MEN: EMPEROR VULCAN

WRITER: Christopher Yost
PENCILER: Paco Diaz
INKER: Vicente Cifuentes
COLORISTS: Brian Reber (*#1-3*) & Chris Sotomayor (*#4-5*) with Rául Treviño (*#3*)
LETTERER: VC's Joe Caramagna
COVER ART: Billy Tan & Frank D'Armata with Danny Miki & Allen Martinez (*#1-3*)

X-MEN: DIVIDED WE STAND

WRITER: Andy Schmidt
ARTIST & COLORIST: Frazer Irving
LETTERER: VC's Joe Caramagna
COVER ART: Brandon Peterson

SECRET INVASION: WAR OF KINGS

WRITERS: Dan Abnett & Andy Lanning
PENCILERS: Paul Pelletier & Bong Dazo
INKERS: Rick Magyar & Joe Pimentel
COLORISTS: Wil Quintana & Michael Kelleher
LETTERER: VC's Joe Caramagna
COVER ART: Brandon Peterson

X-MEN: KINGBREAKER

WRITER: Christopher Yost
PENCILERS: Dustin Weaver with Paco Diaz (*#3-4*)
INKERS: Jaime Mendoza with Victor Olazaba (*#2*) & Vicente Cifuentes (*#3-4*)
COLORISTS: Nathan Fairbairn with John Rauch (*#2*)
LETTERER: VC's Joe Caramagna
COVER ART: Brandon Peterson

WAR OF KINGS: DARKHAWK

WRITERS: C.B. Cebulski with Dan Abnett & Andy Lanning (*#2*)
PENCILERS: Harvey Tolibao with Bong Dazo (*#1*) & Paolo Pantalena (*#2*)
INKERS: Harvey Tolibao with Joe Pimentel (*#1*) & Paolo Pantalena (*#2*)
COLORISTS: Jay David Ramos with Rain Beredo (*#1*) & John Rauch (*#2*)
LETTERERS: VC's Cory Petit (*#1*) & Rus Wooton (*#2*)
COVER ART: Brandon Peterson

WAR OF KINGS: WARRIORS

GLADIATOR: "DUTY"
WRITER: Christos Gage
PENCILER: Mahmud Asrar
INKERS: Mahmud Asrar & Jeffrey Huet
COLORIST: Val Staples

BLASTAAR: "HOMECOMING"
WRITER: Christos Gage
PENCILER: Carlos Magno
INKERS: Jeffrey Huet & Norman Lee
COLORISTS: Andy Troy & Sotocolor

CRYSTAL: "GROWING PAINS"
WRITER: Jay Faerber
PENCILER: Adriana Melo
INKER: Mariah Benes
COLORIST: Nei Ruffino

LILANDRA: "RITE OF PASSAGE"
WRITER: Jay Faerber
ARTIST: Ramón K. Pérez
COLORIST: Nathan Fairbairn

LETTERER: Dave Sharpe
COVER ART: Paul Renaud
DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL CONTENT: John Cerilli
DIGITAL COORDINATOR: Harry Go
DIGITAL PRODUCTION MANAGER: Tim Smith 3

WAR OF KINGS

WRITERS: Dan Abnett & Andy Lanning
PENCILER: Paul Pelletier
INKERS: Rick Magyar with Andrew Hennessy (#6)
COLORIST: Wil Quintana
LETTERER: VC's Joe Caramagna
COVER ART: Brandon Peterson

WAR OF KINGS: ASCENSION

WRITERS: Dan Abnett & Andy Lanning
PENCILER: Wellington Alves
INKERS: Scott Hanna with Nelson Pereira (#2-3)
COLORIST: GURU-eFX
LETTERER: VC's Cory Petit
COVER ART: Brandon Peterson

WAR OF KINGS: SAVAGE WORLD OF SKAAR

WRITER: Christos Gage
PENCILERS: Graham Nolan & Reilly Brown
INKER: Nelson DeCastro
COLORIST: Sotocolor's A. Street
LETTERER: Ed Dukeshire
COVER ART: Paul Pelletier, Roland Paris & Frank D'Armata

NOVA #23-28

WRITERS: Dan Abnett & Andy Lanning
PENCILERS: Andrea Di Vito (#23-24 & #26-28) & Kevin Sharpe (#25)
INKERS: Andrea Di Vito (#23-24 & #26-28) with Jeffrey Huet & Nelson Pereira (#25)
COLORIST: Bruno Hang
LETTERERS: VC's Joe Caramagna (#23) & Cory Petit (#24-28)
COVER ART: Daniel Acuña

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY #13-19

WRITERS: Dan Abnett & Andy Lanning

ISSUES #13-15 & #17:
PENCILER: Brad Walker
INKERS: Victor Olazaba with Livesay (#15) & Scott Hanna (#17)
COLORISTS: Wil Quintana (#13) & Jay David Ramos (#14-15 & #17)
COVER ART: Salvador Larroca & Frank D'Armata (#13-15), Daniel Acuña (#17)

ISSUES #16 & #18-19:
ARTIST: Wes Craig
COLORIST: Nathan Fairbairn
COVER ART: Pasqual Ferry & Frank D'Armata (#16 & #18), Alex Garner (#19)

LETTERERS: VC's Joe Caramagna (#13-14 & #16-19) & Chris Eliopoulos (#15)

WAR OF KINGS: WHO WILL RULE?

WRITERS: Dan Abnett & Andy Lanning
PENCILER: Paul Pelletier
INKER: Andrew Hennessy
COLORIST: GURU-eFX
LETTERER: VC's Joe Caramagna
COVER ART: Brandon Peterson

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RECENTLY, THE GALAXY WAS TORN APART BY BACK-TO-BACK COSMIC WARS against the Negative Zone conqueror Annihilus and the techno-organic Phalanx. The peacekeeping Nova Corps were wiped out, save for one survivor: Richard Rider of Earth, who absorbed the computerized Xandarian Worldmind. Annihilus' armies overran and destabilized many planets and systems, including the Skrull Empire. Annihilus murdered universal protector Quasar and took his powerful Quantum Bands. Even Thanos of Titan perished in the massive conflict, killed by Drax the Destroyer.

Ultimately, Annihilus was killed and his armies routed. Phyla-Vell stole back the Quantum Bands, becoming the new Quasar. But the Phalanx, led by Ultron, attacked the weakened Kree homeworld Hala, and surrounded the entire Kree Empire with a massive force shield. Star-Lord and a loose-knit band of heroes fought back against the occupying Phalanx, eventually defeating them with Nova and Phyla-Vell's aid — though Phyla's lover Moondragon was killed in the battle. In the Annihilation War's aftermath, Star-Lord turned his guerilla group into an official team: the Guardians of the Galaxy. From their base on the floating Celestial head called Knowhere, they protect a badly damaged universe against future threats, wherever they might arise.

Meanwhile on Earth, the unbalanced Scarlet Witch depowered most of the planet's mutants, including X-Men Polaris and Professor X. This reality-altering event, called "M-Day," also awakened the comatose mutant Vulcan, who then attacked the X-Men. The team soon discovered that Vulcan was Cyclops and Havok's long-lost brother — and that the alien Shi'ar Empire had kidnapped his mother many years ago while she was still pregnant, and the mad Shi'ar Emperor D'ken Neramani had murdered her. The fetal Vulcan was ripped from his mother's dying womb and raised as a Shi'ar slave.

Years before, Professor X had discovered the teenage Vulcan and recruited him to a new squad of young, untrained X-Men — but when they were all apparently killed in their first battle, a deeply ashamed Professor X wiped out all memory of the team, including erasing Cyclops' memories of his newfound brother. The X-Men defeated the returned Vulcan and saved Darwin, another survivor of that team who had been suspended inside Vulcan in energy form. But they were furious at Professor X for deceiving them for years, and Vulcan left Earth for the Shi'ar Empire, seeking revenge.

After M-Day, a depowered Quicksilver stole many of the sacred Terrigen Crystals from the Inhumans — a secluded and genetically advanced subgroup of humans created by the Kree millennia ago as biological weapons, now living on Earth's moon in their mobile city Attilan. Quicksilver hoped that the crystals, which allowed new Inhumans to awaken their powers, could repower Earth's mutants, but the U.S. government seized them. In response, Inhuman king Black Bolt declared war against the United States. The Inhuman army clashed with the Fantastic Four and Avengers and recovered the crystals, but Gorgon was exposed and mutated into a more bestial form.

Soon after, the Skrulls' secret invasion was revealed. For years they had used their shape-shifting powers to infiltrate Earth's superhuman community, preparing for an all-out assault on Earth. The Skrulls kidnapped and replaced Black Bolt, trying to harness his destructive vocal powers into a weapon. When Skrulls attacked Attilan, the Inhumans learned of the impostor Black Bolt. They defeated the attackers and rescued their king — though to do so they had to forge a temporary alliance with the Kree, and agreed to an arranged marriage between new Kree ruler Ronan the Accuser and Inhuman princess Crystal.

Now, Black Bolt has had enough of his people and culture being victimized. Realizing that avoiding outside threats is not enough, Black Bolt has decided that the Inhumans must become proactive, must fight for their survival — and must finally embrace their millennia-old destiny.

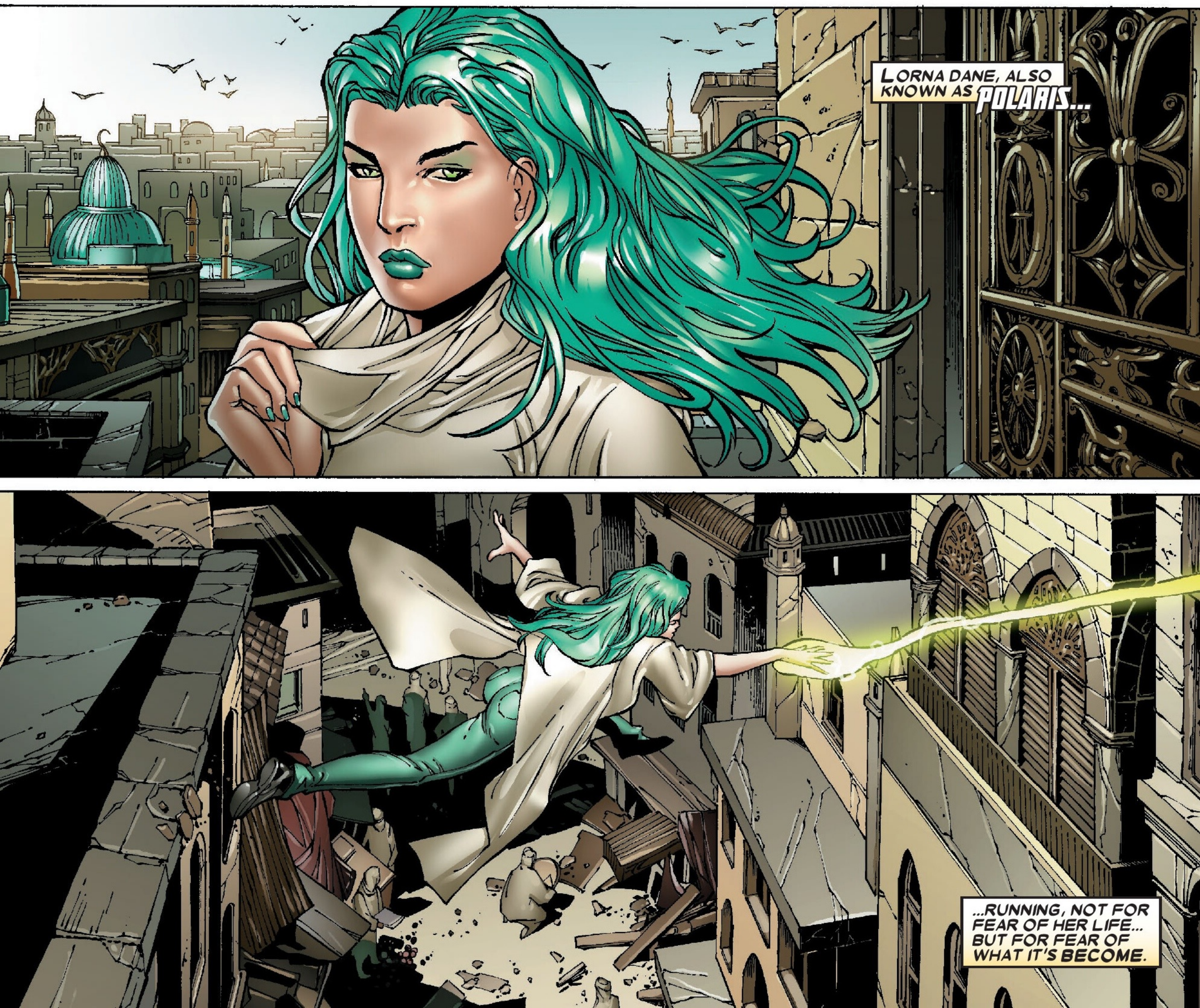
UNCANNY X-MEN 475

AL QUTAY, EGYPT-- APPROXIMATELY 100 MILES FROM CAIRO
<THANK YOU.>
OH... DAMN IT.
<MISS! YOUR CHANGE!>
<MOVE! MOVE! OUT OF OUR WAY!>

‹TRACE AMOUNTS OF ENERGY...SHE WENT DOWN HERE, SIR.›
‹YES...WE SHALL HAVE THIS *APOCALYPSE WENCH* TODAY.›

‹I'M NOT SO CERTAIN...SHE *HAS* ELUDED US SINCE ALEXANDRIA.›
‹THIS ONE, SHE'S *CRAFTY*.›

NO, SHE'S *DESPERATE*... BECAUSE SHE DOESN'T WANT TO KILL YOU...


LORNA DANE, ALSO KNOWN AS POLARIS...
...RUNNING, NOT FOR FEAR OF HER LIFE... BUT FOR FEAR OF WHAT IT'S BECOME.

TWO DAYS EARLIER... THE XAVIER INSTITUTE.
STILL NOTHING?
YES...IT'S SIMPLY DEAD AIR, I'M AFRAID, HANK.
WELL, I RAN A DIAGNOSTIC AND EVERYTHING'S WORKING...YOUR MESSAGE IS TRANSMITTING. SO WHATEVER THE PROBLEM IS, IT'S NOT ON OUR END.
UNFORTUNATELY, THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I DIDN'T WANT TO HEAR.
I KNOW. BUT I'VE SET A PROGRAM THAT'LL BROADCAST YOUR MESSAGE EVERY THIRTY MINUTES.
THAT'S THE BEST WE CAN DO. OTHER THAN TO HOPE.
I'M AFRAID I'VE GOT PRECIOUS LITTLE OF THAT LEFT IN ME, HANK... AFTER THE PAST FEW WEEKS.
HAVE YOU AND SCOTT...? I MEAN...
IT'S STILL BAD. OUR FEW INTERACTIONS HAVE BEEN TENSE, AT BEST.
HE WANTS ME OUT OF THE INSTITUTE.

AND I CAN'T SAY AS I BLAME HIM.
I BETRAYED HIM...REGARDLESS OF MY REASONS.
I WISH I KNEW WHAT TO SAY.
IT'S HARD, CARING ABOUT YOU BOTH.
I'M SORRY. I DON'T MEAN TO PUT YOU IN THE MIDDLE.
LET ME KNOW IF THERE'S ANY NEWS ON THE TRANSMISSION...
I SUPPOSE IT'S TIME FOR ME TO BEGIN WORK ON PLAN B.
AH, KURT... I'M SORRY TO INTRUDE ON YOUR STUDIES.
THE ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES
NOT AT ALL, PROFESSOR... JUST A LITTLE LIGHT READING.
WHAT IS IT THAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

WELL, I'VE JUST BEEN WORKING WITH BEAST...
CHECKING UP ON YOUR PATIENT?
NO, ACTUALLY... THOUGH THIS DOES CONCERN HIM.
BUT NO, I'M AFRAID THIS IS ANOTHER ISSUE, AND A BIT MORE COMPLICATED...
WHAT IS IT, CHARLES? WHAT DO YOU NEED?
I NEED TO STOP MY PAST MISTAKES FROM DESTROYING EVERYTHING LEFT THAT I STILL CARE ABOUT, KURT...
...AND IT'S NOT GOING TO BE EASY, OR SAFE, TO DO THAT...
THE ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES
CHARLES DARWIN
AND I NEED HELP...
OF COURSE I'LL HELP, CHARLES. NO MATTER WHAT HAS OCCURRED, YOU WILL ALWAYS BE THE MAN WHO SAVED MY LIFE.
SO WHAT FIRE ARE WE JUMPING INTO NEXT, THEN?

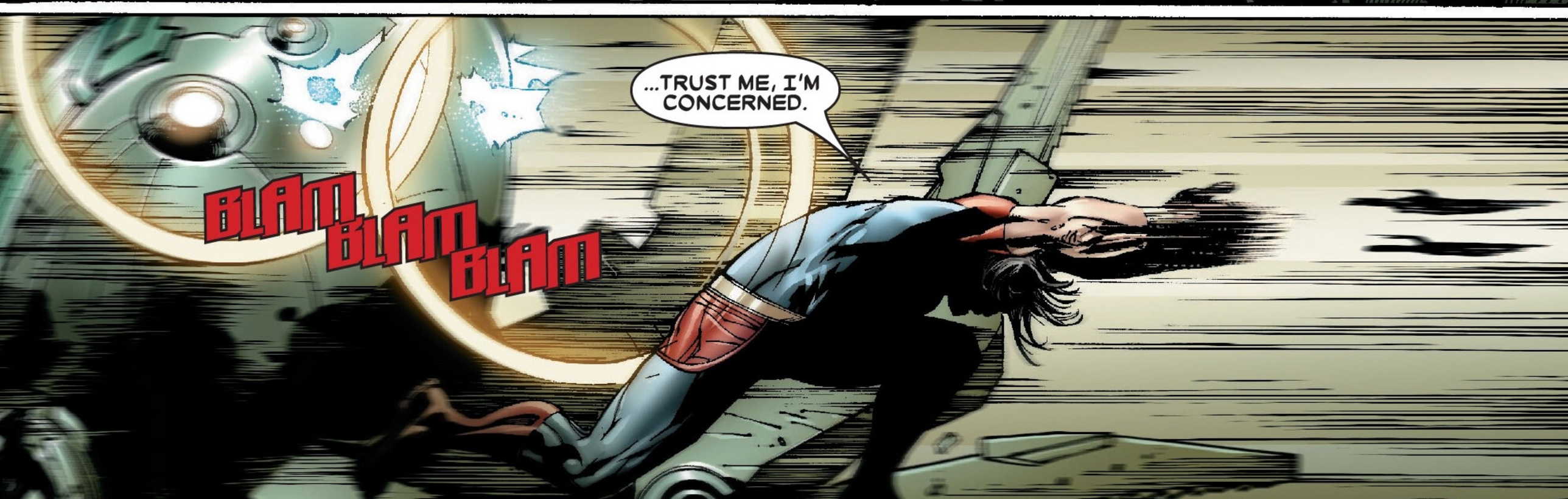
KA-WHOOOM
KEEP MOVING, LORNA...
...THESE IDIOTS ARE SERIOUS.
‹CONFIRMED HIT?›
‹NO, SIR. SHE MANAGED TO AVOID INJURY.›
‹DAMN.›

BAMF
THAT BUILDING IS FULL OF *PEOPLE*...
...I MUST GET THEM TO SAFETY.
I'M AFRAID YOU'LL HAVE TO HANDLE THIS ON *YOUR OWN* FOR A FEW MINUTES.
NOT A PROBLEM.
I'M A BIT OUT OF *PRACTICE*, ANYWAY.

WHUUB

‹STOP! THIS IS NONE OF YOUR CONCERN!›

JAMES PROUDSTAR, ALSO KNOWN AS WARPATH.
THE WOMAN YOU'RE HUNTING IS AN X-MAN...

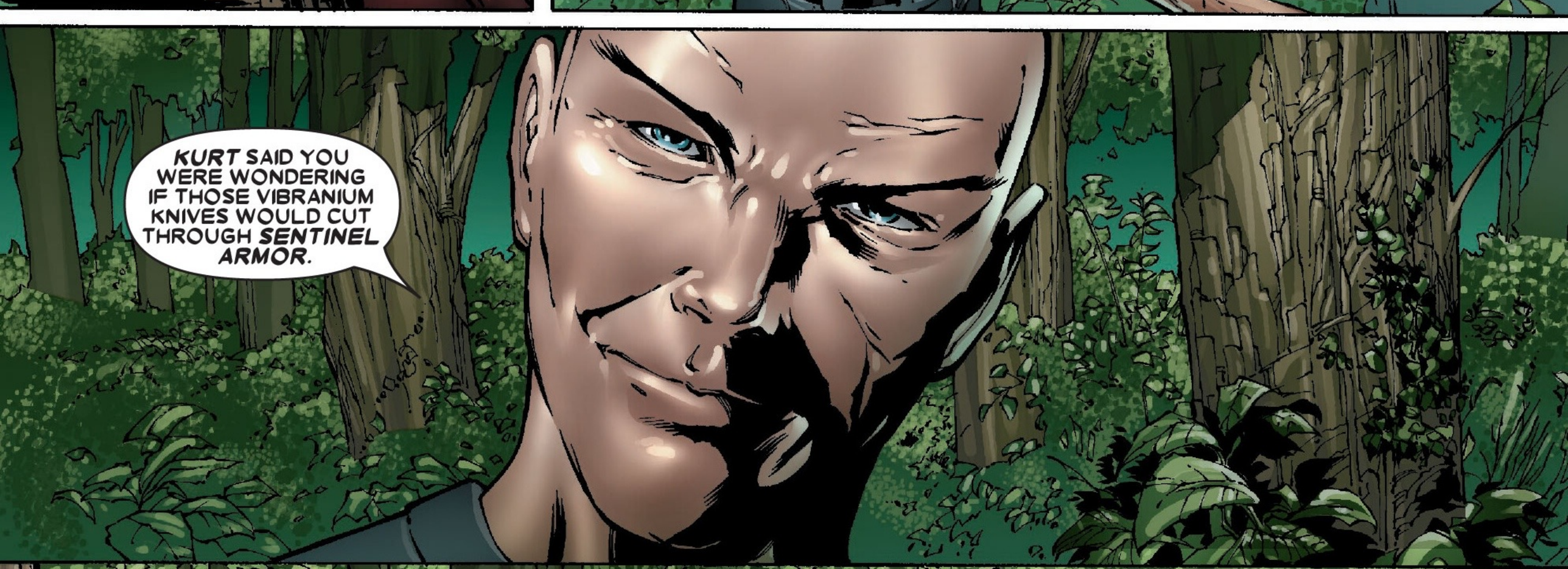

...TRUST ME, I'M CONCERNED.
BLAM BLAM BLAM

THNNK
THNK
THAT'S QUITE SOMETHING, JAMES.
ORORO WILL BE HAPPY TO SEE HER GIFT TO YOU, AT LEAST, IS BEING PUT TO GOOD USE.
I'LL BE SURE TO TELL HER, PROFESSOR.
BLADES OF PURE VIBRANIUM... PERFECTLY BALANCED, ABLE TO CUT THROUGH ALMOST ANYTHING.
THEY'RE A WORK OF ART.
YOU'VE BEEN TESTING YOUR ACCURACY, THEN?
YEAH...WITH MY REFLEXES, AND HAND-EYE CONTROL...
...IT'S DAMN NEAR PRECISION.
THNNK

BUT YOU DIDN'T DRAG YOURSELF OUT HERE TO WATCH MY TARGET PRACTICE... SO WHY DON'T YOU JUST GET TO YOUR *POINT*?
THE *PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE* THING DOESN'T WORK SO WELL NOW THAT I KNOW YOU CAN'T READ MY MIND.

YES, WELL...I UNDERSTAND FROM NIGHTCRAWLER THAT YOU'RE FAIRLY UNHAPPY HERE.
WATCHING THE INSTITUTE TURNED INTO A *REFUGEE* CAMP?
SENTINELS ON TWENTY-FOUR HOUR WATCH?

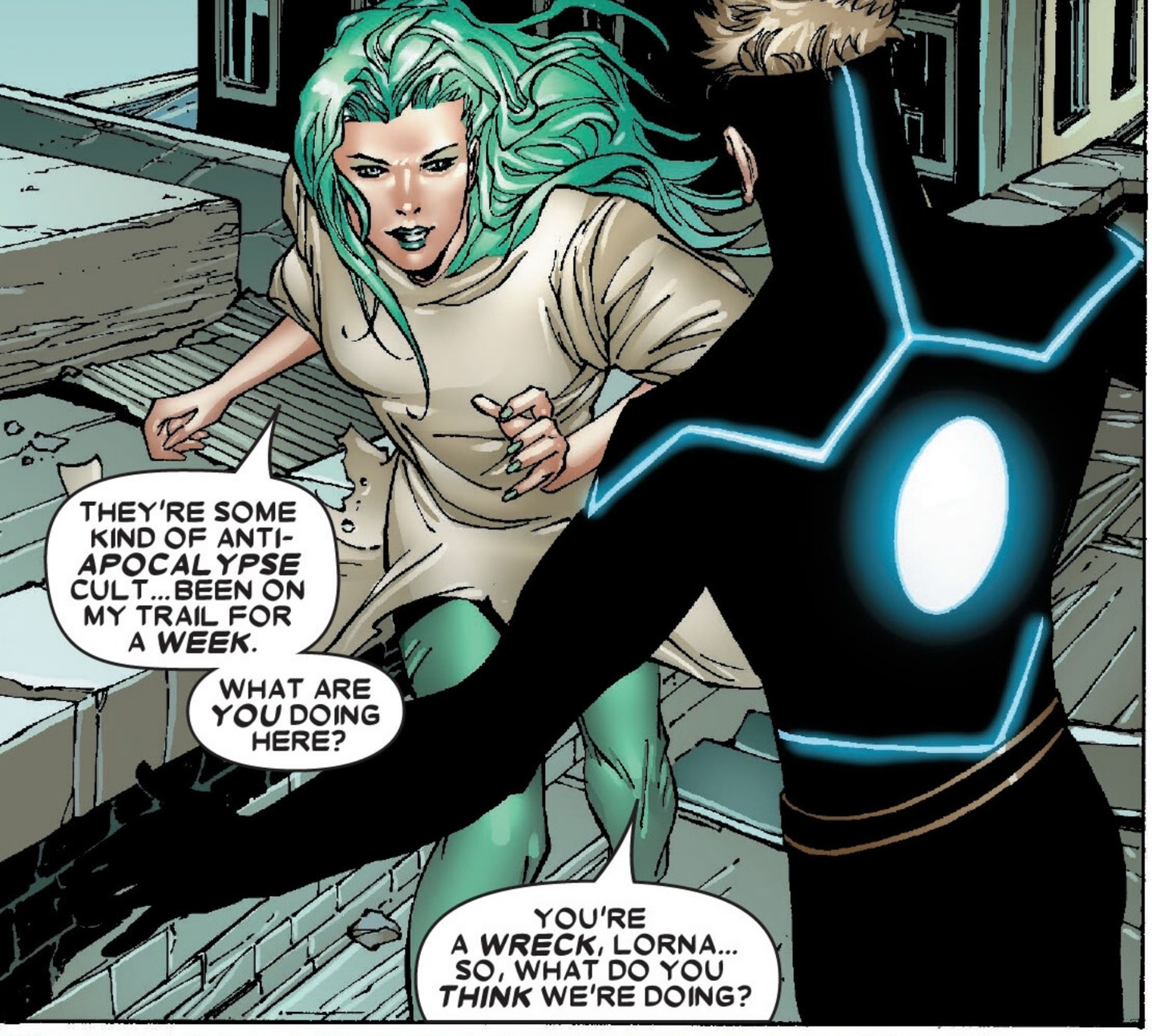
I GREW UP ON A *RES*, PROFESSOR...I DON'T *LIKE* TO FEEL BOXED-IN.


KURT SAID YOU WERE WONDERING IF THOSE VIBRANIUM KNIVES WOULD CUT THROUGH *SENTINEL ARMOR*.

I WAS KIDDING... *MOSTLY*. BUT IT'S NOT AN UNREASONABLE THING TO *CONSIDER*.
THEY MAY NOT BE TRYING TO EXTERMINATE US THIS *EXACT* MOMENT, BUT--
I *KNOW*, JAMES.
THEY DON'T MAKE *ME* FEEL ANY SAFER, EITHER.

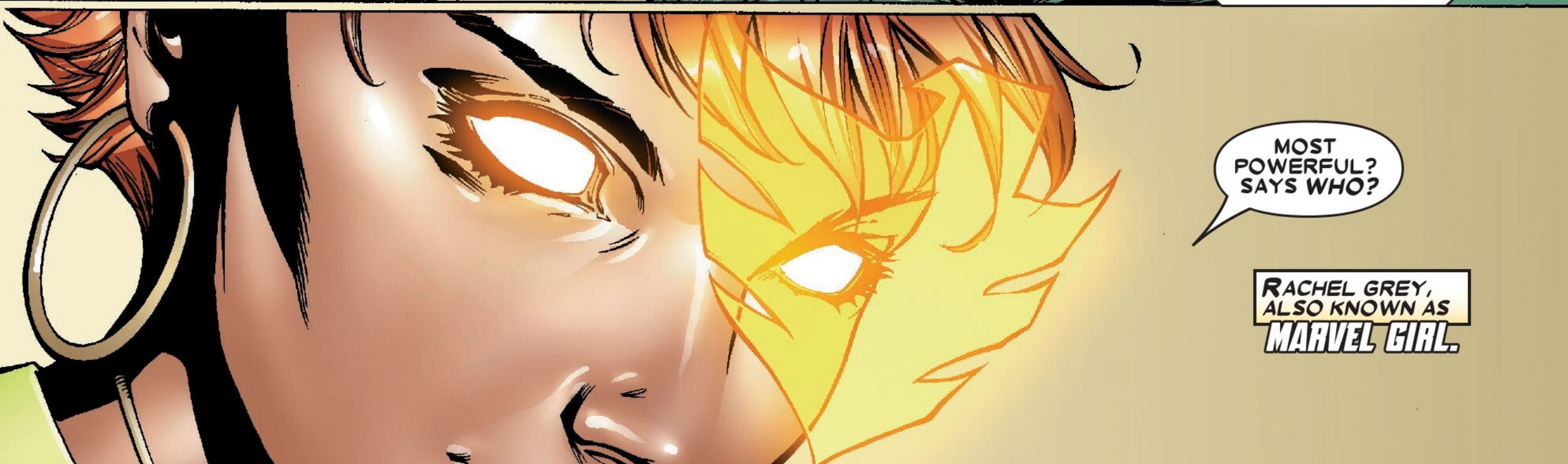
UNFORTUNATELY, I CAN'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT THE SENTINELS. NOT AT THIS POINT, AT LEAST.
BUT I CAN OFFER YOU SOMETHING ELSE...
OH YEAH? LIKE WHAT?
A CHANCE TO GET OUT OF HERE... A MISSION...
ONE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE.
THEY ALWAYS ARE...BUT WHY ME? I'M NOT ONE OF YOUR INNER CIRCLE.
OH, THAT'S RIGHT... MOST OF THEM ARE PISSED AT YOU RIGHT NOW.
THERE IS THAT... BUT THERE'S ANOTHER REASON AS WELL.
OF ALL THE X-MEN HERE...
...NONE HAVE EVER HATED ME THE WAY YOU DID, JAMES.

BAMF
BAMF
BAMF
BAMF
YOU WANT TO TELL ME WHAT YOU'VE GOTTEN INTO THIS TIME, LORNA?
ALEX!
WHO ARE THESE GUYS?


THEY'RE SOME KIND OF ANTI-APOCALYPSE CULT...BEEN ON MY TRAIL FOR A WEEK.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
YOU'RE A WRECK, LORNA... SO, WHAT DO YOU THINK WE'RE DOING?

WE'RE HERE TO SAVE YOU.
ALEX SUMMERS, ALSO KNOWN AS HAVOK.

JAMES, WE FOUND HER. SHE'S ON A ROOF ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SQUARE.
WHERE'S HAVOK?
I LEFT HIM WITH HER. SHE'S FREAKING AND HE KNOWS HER BEST.
SO, OUR MOST POWERFUL MEMBER IS PLAYING DOCTOR? GREAT.


MOST POWERFUL? SAYS WHO?
RACHEL GREY, ALSO KNOWN AS MARVEL GIRL.

--AND IT WILL, OF COURSE, BE *QUITE* DANGEROUS...

...TO *YOU* MORE THAN ANYONE, I'M AFRAID.

HOW MANY DIFFERENT WAYS DO I HAVE TO SAY *YES*, PROFESSOR?

I DON'T *CARE* ABOUT THE DANGER. I WANT TO GO.

IN FACT, I CAN'T *WAIT*.

YES, AND THAT'S WHY I'VE BEEN *RELUCTANT* TO ASK YOU ALONG...

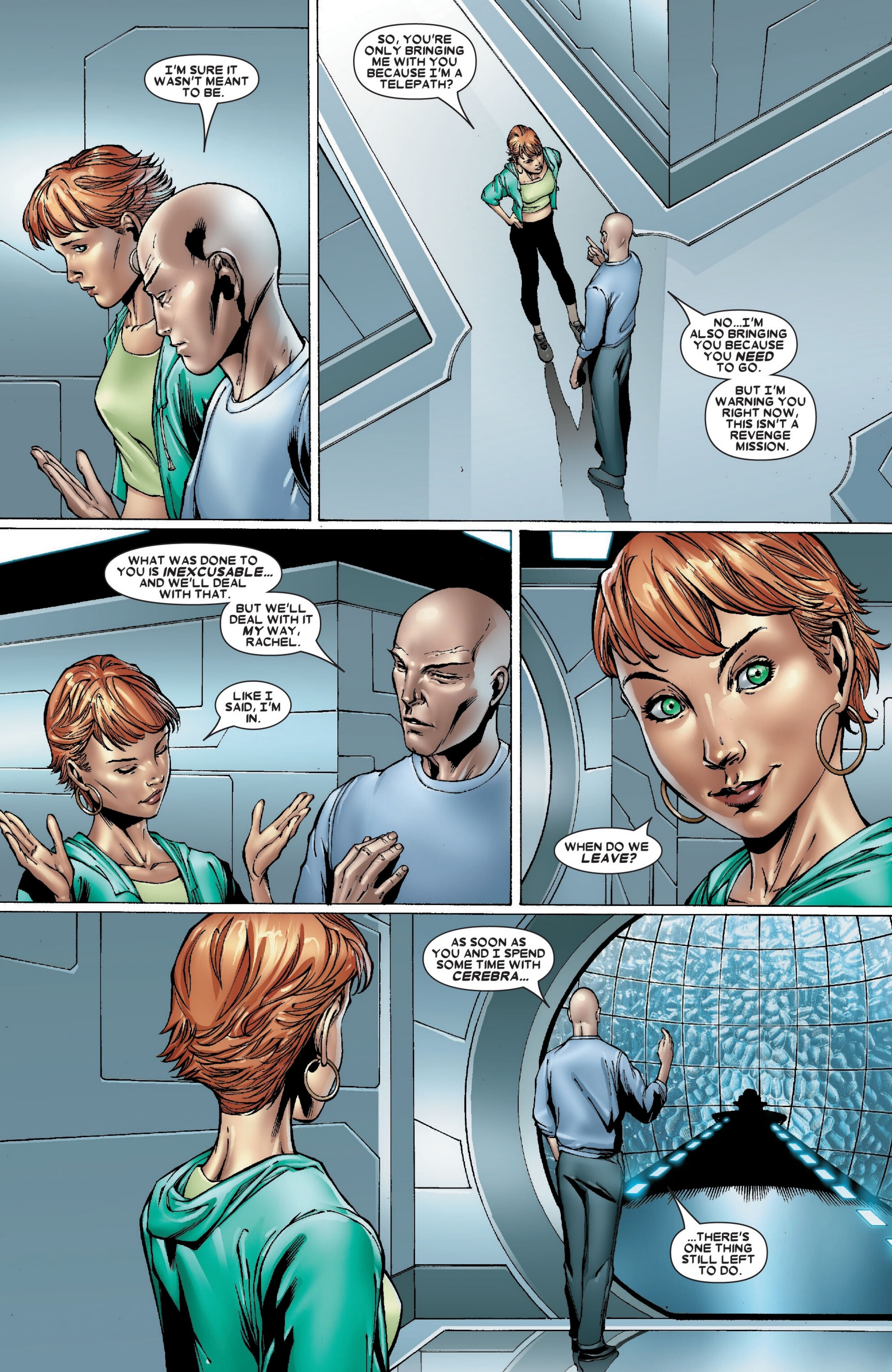
...BUT I *NEED* A TELEPATH, SOMEONE WHO CAN WORK *WITH* ME.

SINCE I LOST MY POWERS, IT'S LIKE I'M *DEAF*. THAT BACKGROUND NOISE THAT YOU GET SO USED TO...THE THOUGHTS OF THE WORLD...

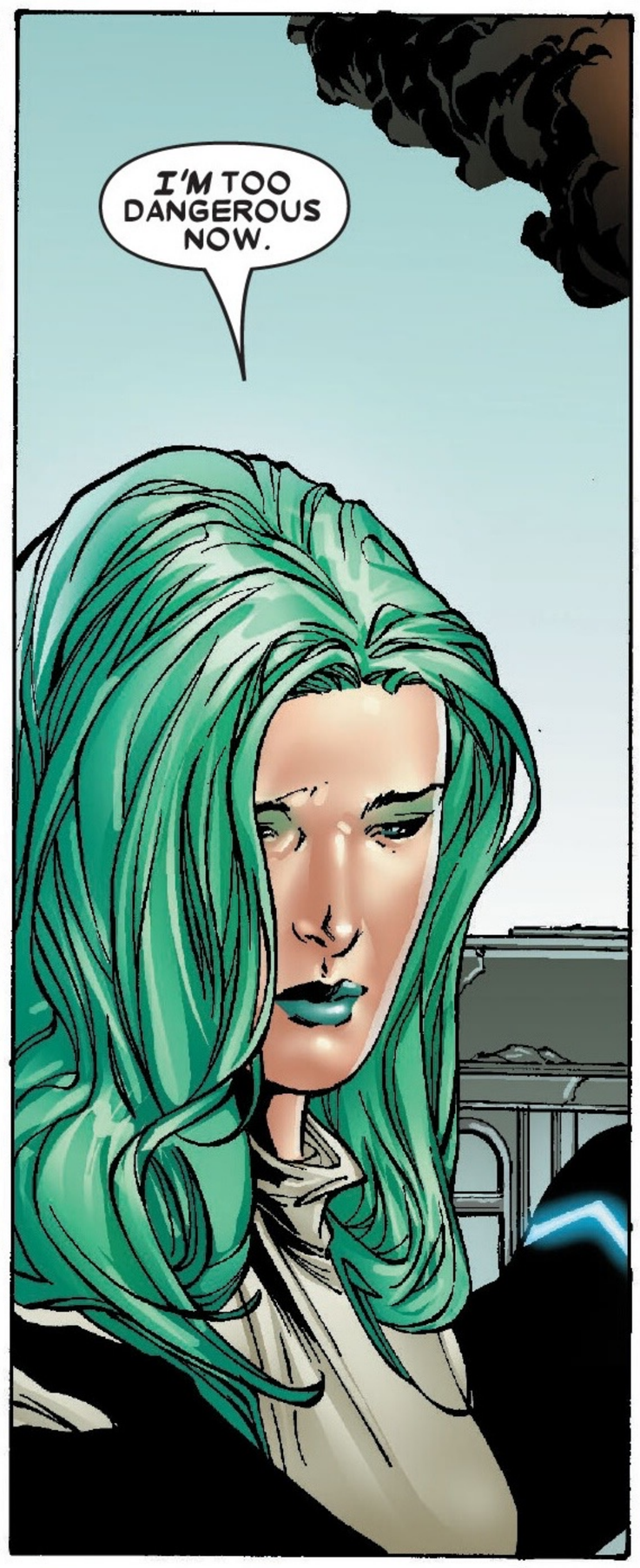
...NOW IT'S JUST GONE.

YEAH, I DON'T THINK IT WAS A FAIR TRADE...

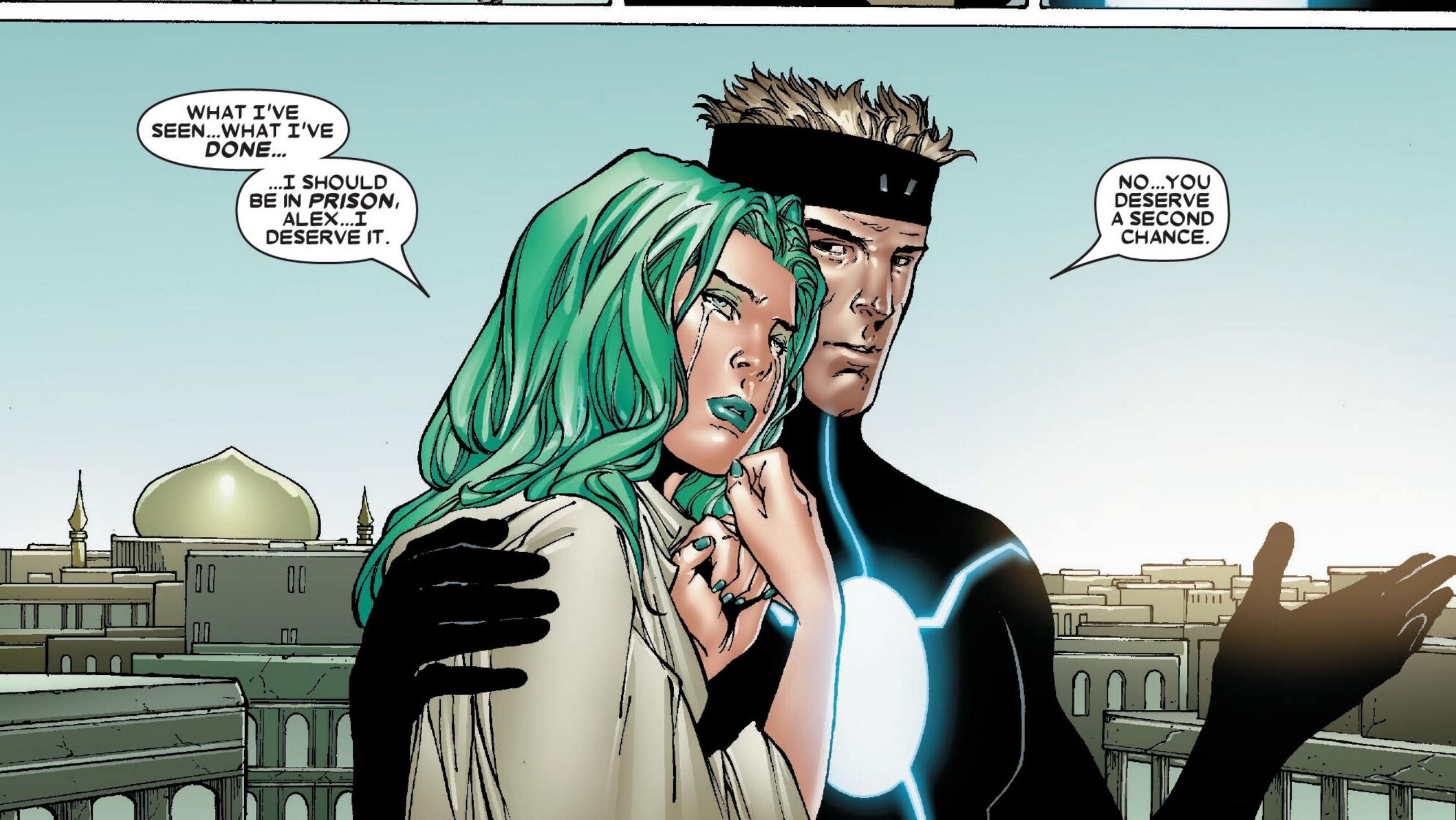
...YOUR *LEGS* FOR YOUR TELEPATHY.


I'M SURE IT WASN'T MEANT TO BE.
SO, YOU'RE ONLY BRINGING ME WITH YOU BECAUSE I'M A TELEPATH?
NO...I'M ALSO BRINGING YOU BECAUSE YOU *NEED* TO GO.
BUT I'M WARNING YOU RIGHT NOW, THIS ISN'T A REVENGE MISSION.
WHAT WAS DONE TO YOU IS *INEXCUSABLE*... AND WE'LL DEAL WITH THAT.
BUT WE'LL DEAL WITH IT *MY* WAY, RACHEL.
LIKE I SAID, I'M IN.
WHEN DO WE *LEAVE*?
AS SOON AS YOU AND I SPEND SOME TIME WITH *CEREBRA*...
...THERE'S ONE THING STILL LEFT TO DO.

WHY ARE YOU *RUNNING?* I THOUGHT YOUR POWERS WERE BACK?
NO. APOCALYPSE'S PEOPLE DID *SOMETHING* TO ME...GAVE ME A SEMBLANCE OF WHAT I *USED* TO HAVE...
...BUT IT'S HARDER TO *CONTROL*...TOO DANGEROUS...

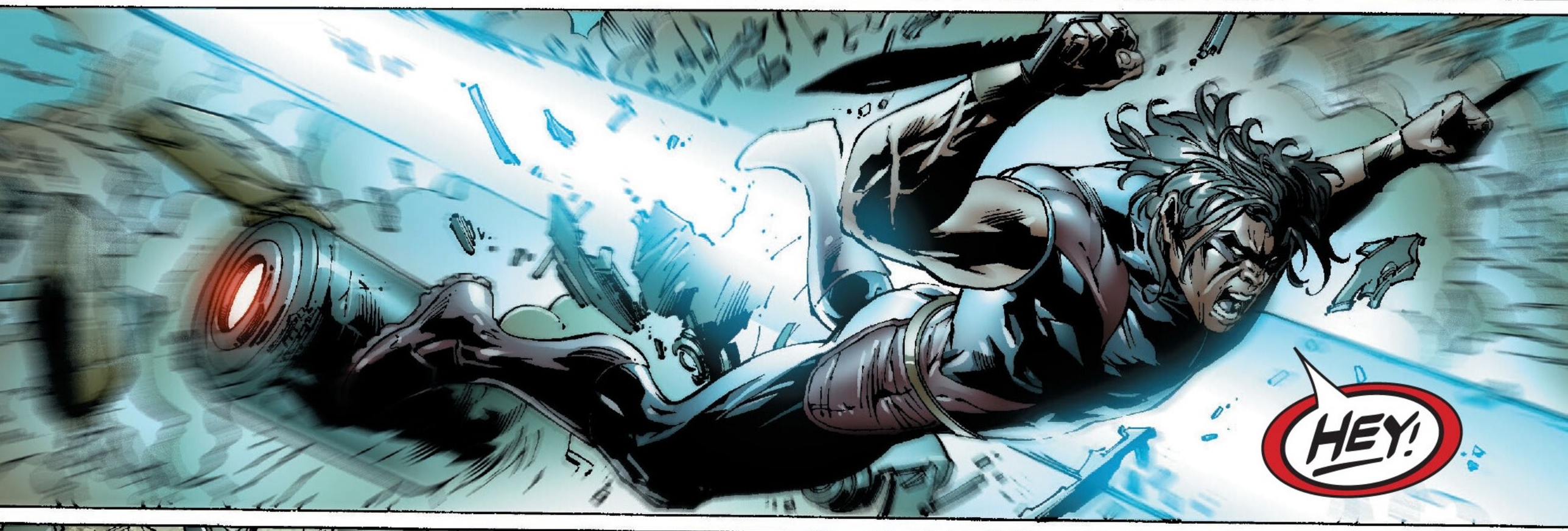

I'M TOO DANGEROUS NOW.

NO YOU'RE *NOT*...YOU'RE JUST SCARED.


WHAT I'VE SEEN...WHAT I'VE *DONE*...
...I SHOULD BE IN *PRISON*, ALEX...I DESERVE IT.
NO...YOU DESERVE A SECOND CHANCE.

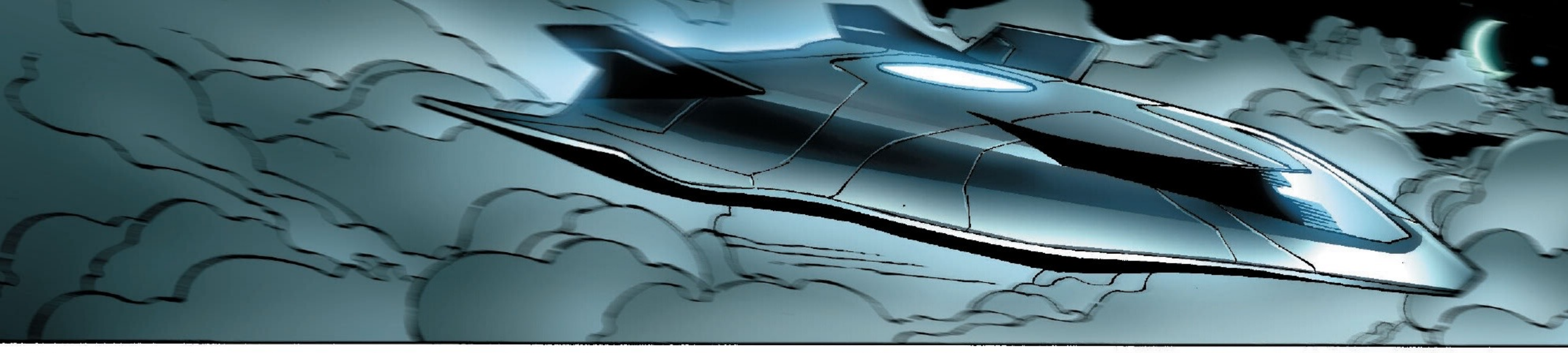
THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A QUICK GRAB AND THEN OUT...
...IT NEVER GOES AS PLANNED, DOES IT?

WELL...THERE WAS THE TIME I KIDNAPPED PROFESSOR X.
BUT OTHER THAN THAT--
SHRRRRPP


HEY!

NICE OF YOU TO LEND A HAND...
...BUT MAYBE A WARNING NEXT TIME?

NO TIME...THE PROFESSOR JUST RADIOED DOWN THAT THERE ARE SENTINELS ON THE WAY.
WE GOTTA GO, NOW.
WAIT--THE PROFESSOR'S HERE?
BAMF
IF YOU'LL ALLOW ME, MEINE FREUNDEN.
BAMF
BAMF
WAIT, KURT! I CAN'T--
LORNA, DON'T BE RIDICULOUS...YOU'RE COMING WITH US.
BAMF

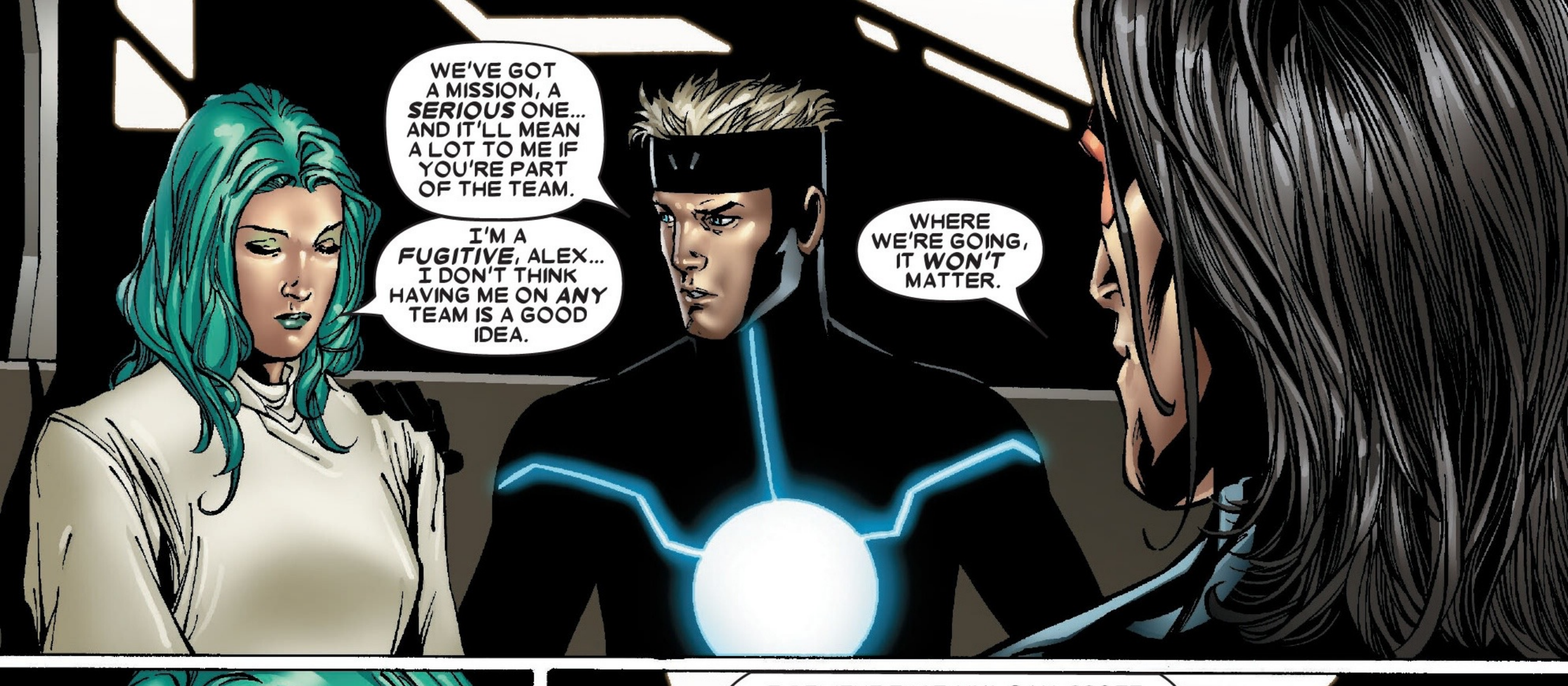


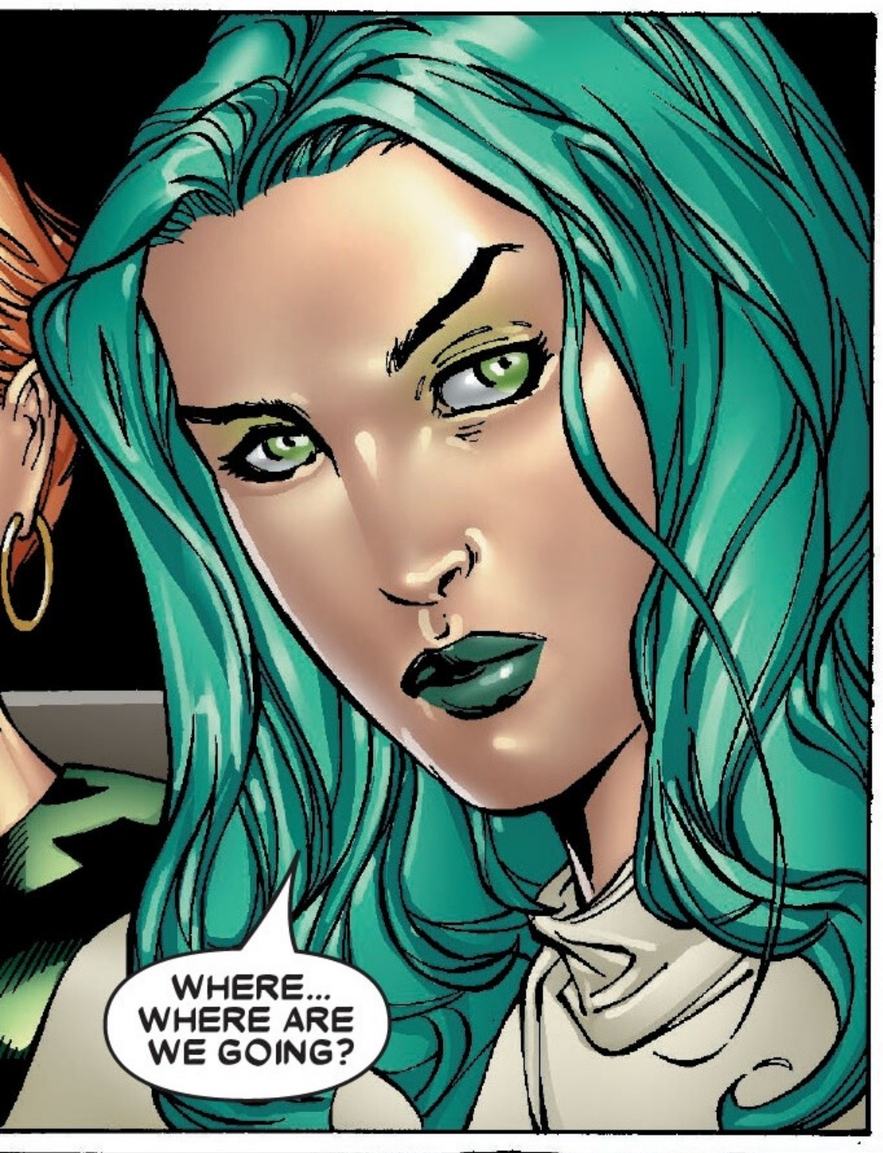
AUTOPILOT ACTIVATED.
ALL RIGHT, WE'RE CLEAR OF SCANNING RANGE... ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, LORNA?
YEAH-- ARE YOU *WALKING* AGAIN?
I *AM*, THOUGH *OTHER* THINGS HAVE CHANGED IN YOUR ABSENCE.
WHY DID YOU COME AFTER ME?

DID YOU THINK WE'D JUST LEAVE YOU OUT HERE ON THE *RUN*?

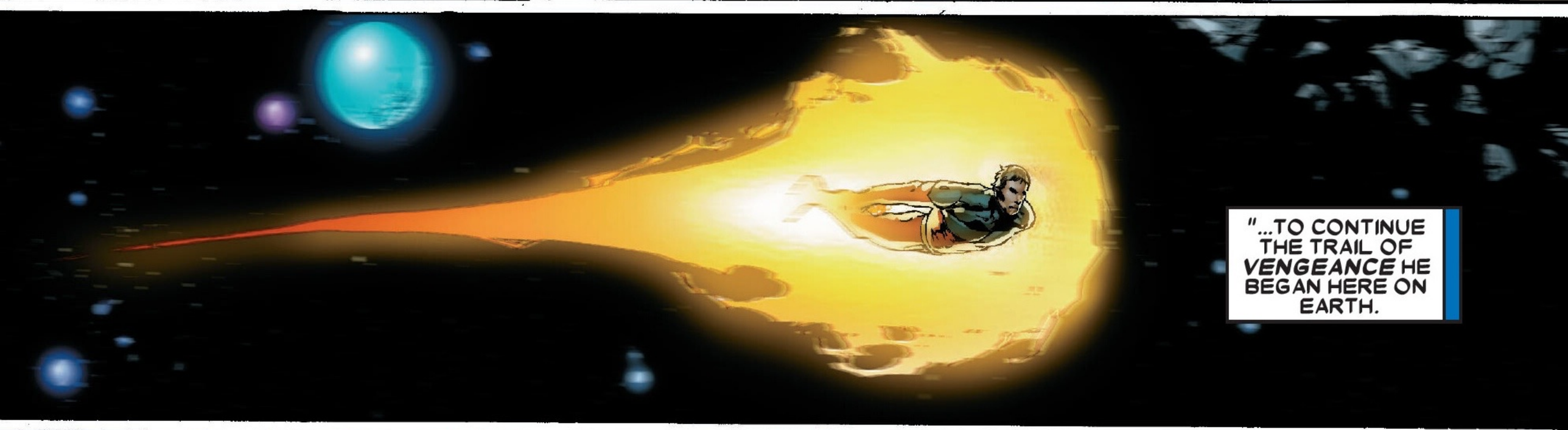
I GUESS I *DID*, YEAH...

THERE'S *NO ONE* ON THIS PLANE WHO HASN'T MADE MISTAKES, LORNA. MOST OF THEM *TRAGIC* ONES.
CONSIDER THIS A CHANCE TO *REDEEM* YOURSELF.
CONSIDER *WHAT* A CHANCE?


WE'VE GOT A MISSION, A SERIOUS ONE... AND IT'LL MEAN A LOT TO ME IF YOU'RE PART OF THE TEAM.
I'M A FUGITIVE, ALEX... I DON'T THINK HAVING ME ON ANY TEAM IS A GOOD IDEA.
WHERE WE'RE GOING, IT WON'T MATTER.


WHERE... WHERE ARE WE GOING?

I BELIEVE THAT VULCAN, SCOTT AND ALEX'S BROTHER--WHO UNTIL RECENTLY I BELIEVED TO BE DEAD--IS HEADING BACK TO THE PLACE HE CAME FROM...
...TO SHI'AR SPACE...


"...TO CONTINUE THE TRAIL OF VENGEANCE HE BEGAN HERE ON EARTH.

"BUT I CAN'T GET A MESSAGE TO LILANDRA.
"MY SHI'AR COMMUNICATIONS HAVE BEEN CUT OFF...SINCE OUR MARRIAGE WAS ANNULLED."

"BUT I *WON'T* LEAVE HER FATE IN THE HANDS OF A MAN WHOSE RAGE IS *MY* RESPONSIBILITY.

"ESPECIALLY NOT WHEN HE'S ONE OF THE MOST *POWERFUL* MUTANTS I'VE EVER ENCOUNTERED."

FIRST, THE FIVE OF YOU ARE GOING TO STEAL A *SPACESHIP*...

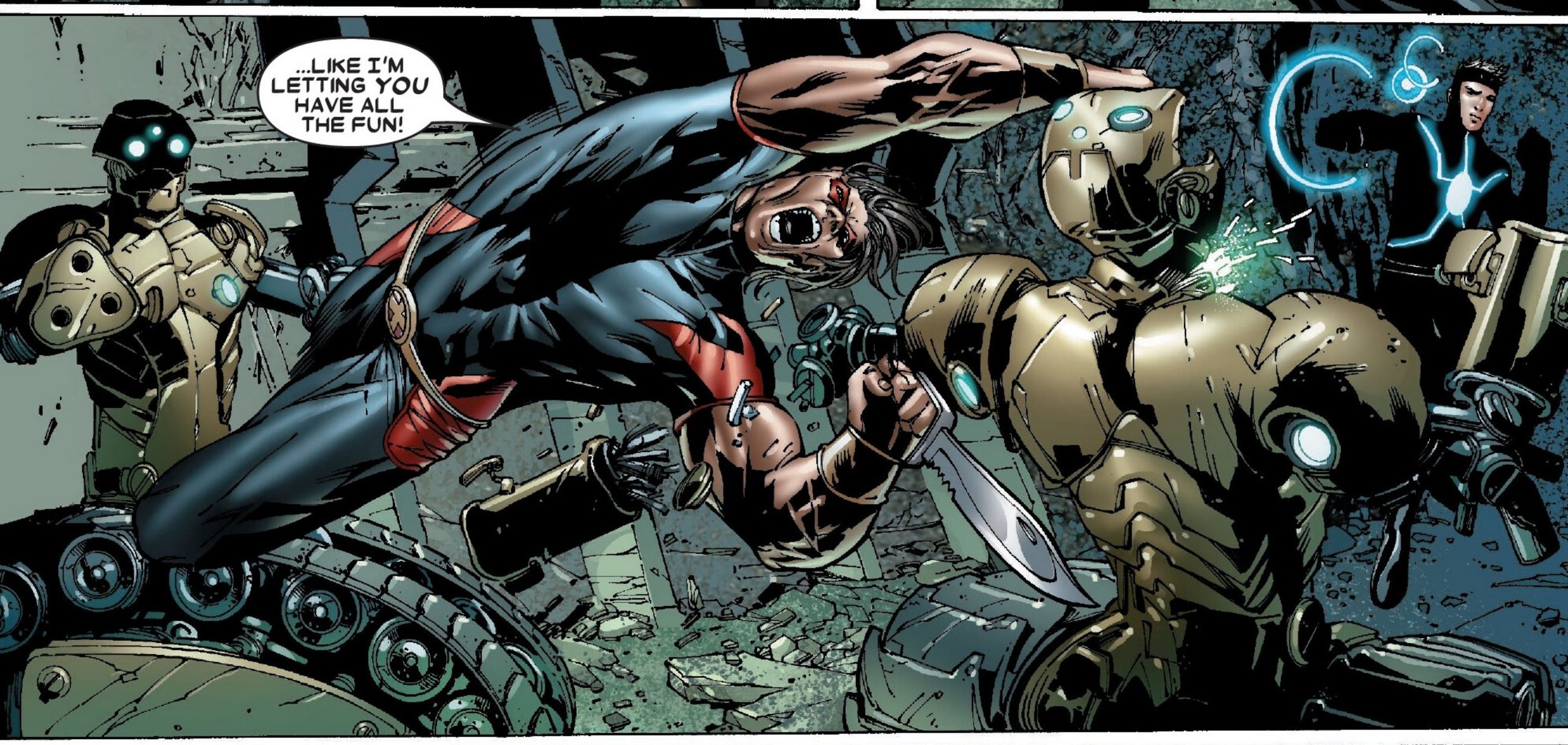
"...AND THEN WE'RE GOING TO PUT OURSELVES IN THE PATH OF VULCAN'S *FURY*...
"...AND HOPE WE CAN BRING HIM BACK TO HIS *HUMANITY* BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE."
THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SAI'AR EMPIRE
CHAPTER ONE--PLAN B

UNCANNY X-MEN 476

KRREEEE
SHRRPPPP
SORRY. LITTLE *MORE* POWER THAN I WAS TRYING TO USE...
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, LORNA... IT GOT THE *JOB* DONE.
WELL, I HATE TO BREAK IT TO YOU, HAVOK...

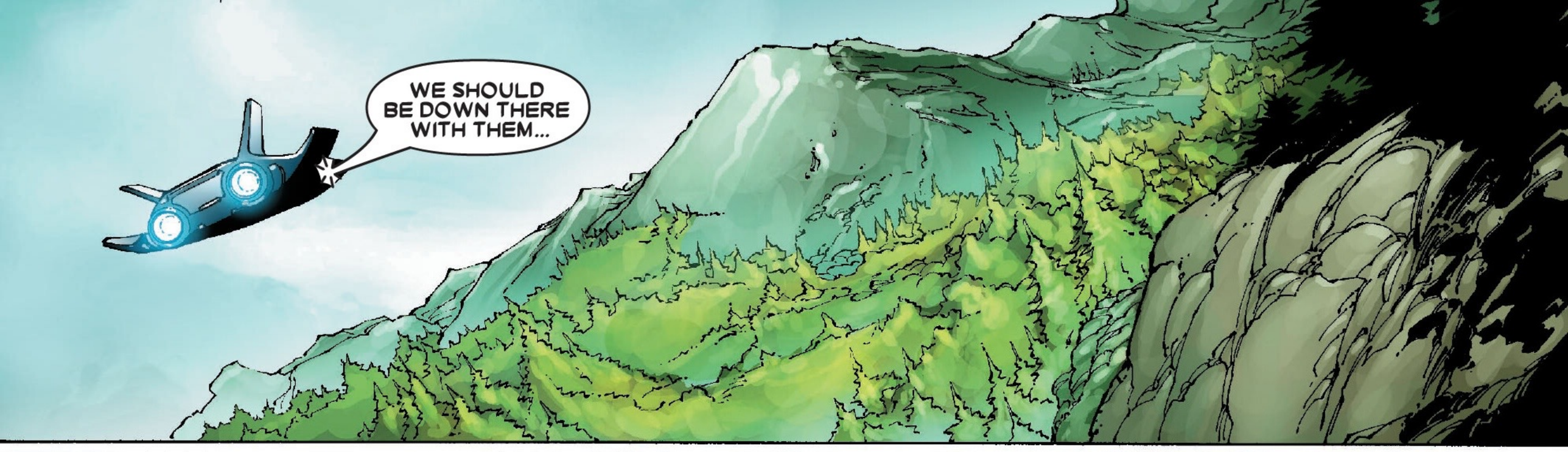
ALERT! MAIN DOORS BREACHED!
ALERT!
...BUT THE JOB ISN'T DONE YET.
ALERT! MAIN DOORS BREACHED!
ALERT!

I'VE GOT THIS.
YEAH, RIGHT...


...LIKE I'M LETTING YOU HAVE ALL THE FUN!

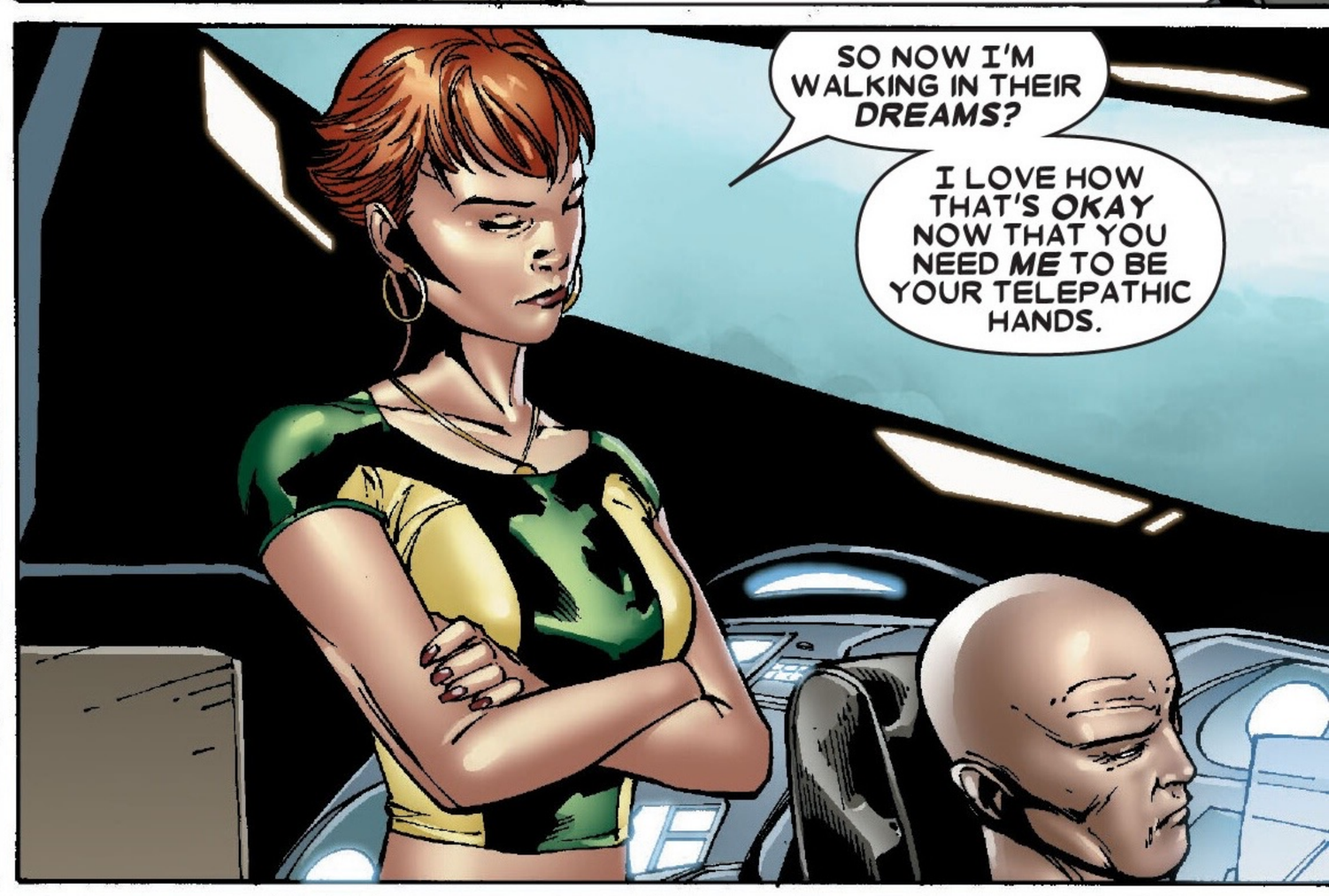
DAMN IT, WARPATH, YOU'RE IN THE WAY!
WHAT, CAN'T YOU AIM?

FINE. HAVE IT YOUR WAY.
HEY!
NOW IS NOT THE TIME FOR GAMES, MEIN FREUNDS...
HEY. TALK TO JAMES, NIGHTCRAWLER... NOT ME.
THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SHI'AR EMPIRE
OKAY, PROFESSOR, WE'RE IN.
The
CHAPTER TWO
THINGS THEY LEFT BEHIND


WE SHOULD BE DOWN THERE WITH THEM...

...OR I SHOULD, AT LEAST.
WE WILL BE IN A FEW MINUTES, RACHEL.
KURT AND THE OTHERS ARE MORE THAN CAPABLE OF CLEARING THE ACCESS TUNNELS.

AND WHAT WE'RE DOING HERE IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT.
ONCE YOU ABSORB THE FLIGHT TRAINING FROM MY MEMORY, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO TEACH OUR WHOLE TEAM WHILE THEY SLEEP.


SO NOW I'M WALKING IN THEIR DREAMS?
I LOVE HOW THAT'S OKAY NOW THAT YOU NEED ME TO BE YOUR TELEPATHIC HANDS.

WE'RE NOT STAYING OUT OF THE FRAY BECAUSE OF ME, ARE WE, PROFESSOR?
NO, DARWIN, WE'RE NOT...
...NOT ENTIRELY, AT LEAST.

THE XAVIER INSTITUTE, EARLIER THAT MORNING

ABSOLUTELY NOT, CHARLES.

HE'S NOT READY FOR *FIELD* WORK.

HE'S MORE READY THAN YOU *THINK*, BUT I HAVE NO PLANS TO LET HIM OUT OF MY SIGHT...AND BEYOND *THAT*--

I *WANT* TO GO, CYCLOPS. I WANT TO HELP.

HE WANTS TO GO.

BOBBY ALWAYS WANTED TO GO, TOO, BUT THAT DIDN'T STOP YOU FROM BENCHING HIM UNTIL HE WAS READY.

THIS IS DIFFERENT. DARWIN AND GABRIEL WERE *FRIENDS*.

HE MAY BE THE *BEST CHANCE* WE HAVE TO REALLY *REACH* YOUR BROTHER.

I DON'T CARE.

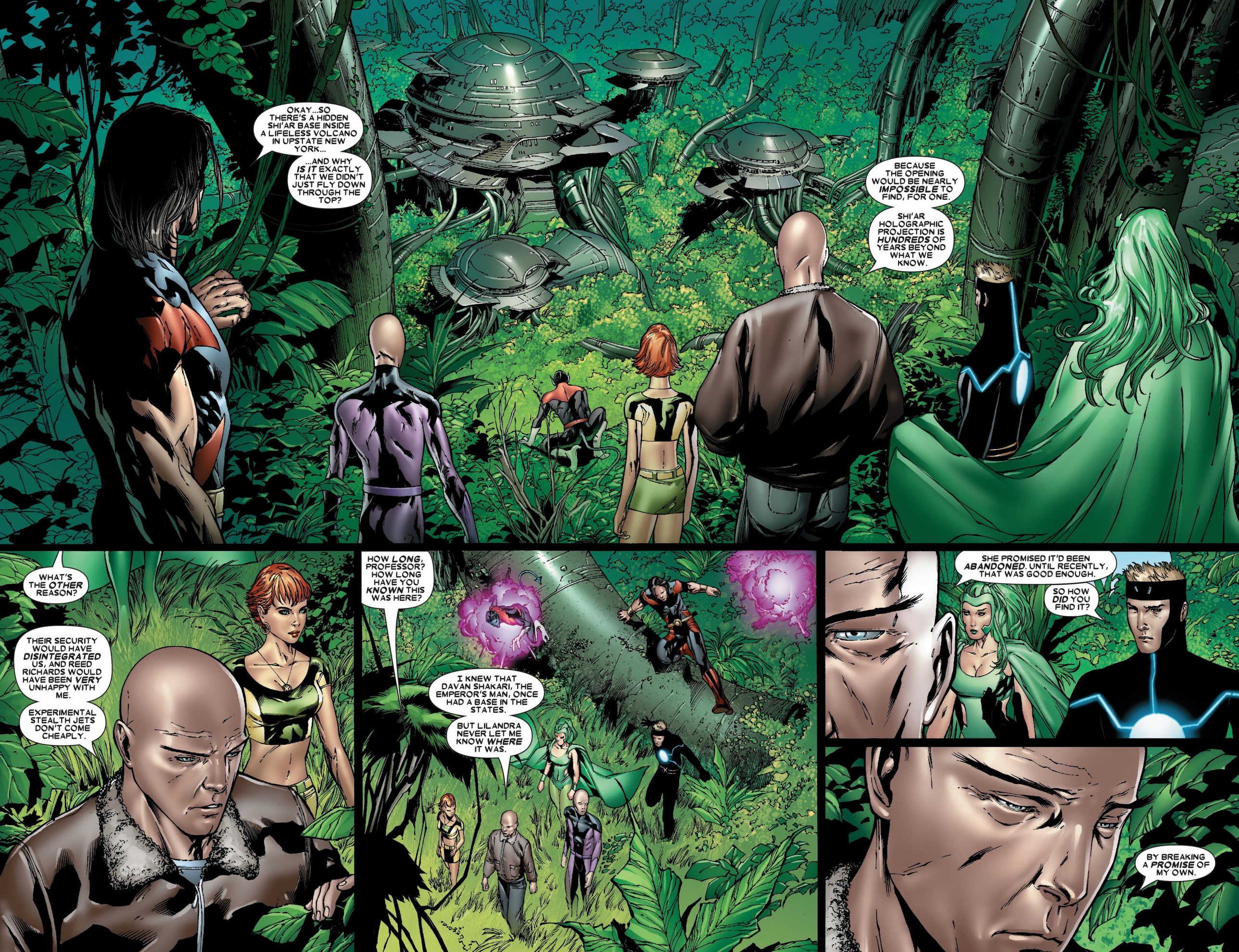
AND TO BE BLUNT, VULCAN IS *NOT* THE BROTHER I'M WORRIED ABOUT.

WELL, HE *SHOULD* BE.

AND YOU SHOULD *ALSO* BE WORRYING ABOUT YOUR *FATHER*, CORSAIR. *HE'S* OUT THERE IN THE PATH OF VULCAN'S FURY, AS WELL.

IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO EITHER OF THEM, ALEX OR DAD...OR RACHEL--
I'M TRYING TO PREVENT A TRAGEDY, SCOTT... NOT CAUSE ONE.
BUT THAT LINE HAS A TENDENCY TO BLUR, DOESN'T IT?
THE ROAD TO HELL AND ALL THAT...
SHOULD I JUST DO NOTHING, SCOTT? WOULD THAT SATISFY YOU?
I'M TRYING TO MAKE UP FOR WHAT I'VE DONE WRONG.
YET ALL I SEE IS YOU TAKING PEOPLE I CARE ABOUT INTO HARM'S WAY.
THAT IS THE WORLD WE LIVE IN.
GIVE HIM A BREAK, SCOTT. I WOULDN'T HAVE LET HIM GO WITHOUT ME.
AS TWISTED AS HE IS, THIS VULCAN IS A SUMMERS...WE TAKE CARE OF OUR OWN, REMEMBER?

ALEX...I JUST...
YOU'RE MAD AT THE PROFESSOR... I KNOW. I AM, TOO.
BUT THIS IS BIGGER THAN US NOW, SCOTT. THERE'S MORE AT RISK.
AND I'M AN X-MAN.
I'M NOT JUST GOING TO SIT ON MY HANDS AND WAIT FOR THE SKY TO FALL.
NO...I GUESS YOU'RE NOT, ARE YOU?
WE NEED TO MOVE. THE STEALTH JET IS HIDDEN BEYOND THESE TUNNELS, BUT THE SENTINELS COULD FIND IT...
...AND THE OTHERS ARE WAITING.
COME ON... WISH US LUCK, BIG BROTHER.
JUST COME HOME SAFELY...
...ALL OF YOU.


OKAY...SO THERE'S A HIDDEN SHI'AR BASE INSIDE A LIFELESS VOLCANO IN UPSTATE NEW YORK...
...AND WHY *IS IT* EXACTLY THAT WE DIDN'T JUST FLY DOWN THROUGH THE TOP?
BECAUSE THE OPENING WOULD BE NEARLY *IMPOSSIBLE* TO FIND, FOR ONE.
SHI'AR HOLOGRAPHIC PROJECTION IS *HUNDREDS* OF YEARS BEYOND WHAT WE KNOW.
WHAT'S THE *OTHER* REASON?
THEIR SECURITY WOULD HAVE *DISINTEGRATED* US, AND REED RICHARDS WOULD HAVE BEEN *VERY* UNHAPPY WITH ME.
EXPERIMENTAL STEALTH JETS DON'T COME CHEAPLY.
HOW *LONG*, PROFESSOR? HOW LONG HAVE YOU *KNOWN* THIS WAS HERE?
I KNEW THAT DAVAN SHAKARI, THE EMPEROR'S MAN, ONCE HAD A BASE IN THE STATES.
BUT LILANDRA NEVER LET ME KNOW *WHERE* IT WAS.
SHE PROMISED IT'D BEEN *ABANDONED*. UNTIL RECENTLY, THAT WAS GOOD ENOUGH.
SO HOW *DID* YOU FIND IT?
BY BREAKING A *PROMISE* OF MY OWN.

I ALLOWED REED RICHARDS AND TONY STARK TO EXAMINE THE SHI'AR TECHNOLOGY I HAVE.

AND WITH WHAT THEY *LEARNED*, THEY HELPED ME FIND THIS PLACE.

IS *THIS* WHERE VULCAN *GREW UP?*

YES...HE WAS PART OF A CONTINGENT OF *SLAVES* WHO WORKED IN THE MANOR HOUSE.

HE *NEVER* TALKED ABOUT HIS LIFE BEFORE MOIRA FOUND HIM.

YES, WELL... DAVAN SHAKARI WAS A *SPY*, AND THIS BASE WAS WHERE VISITING *DIGNITARIES* CAME TO MEET WITH HIM...

"...TO DECIDE IF OUR PLANET WAS *WORTH* ABSORBING INTO THE *SHI'AR EMPIRE.*

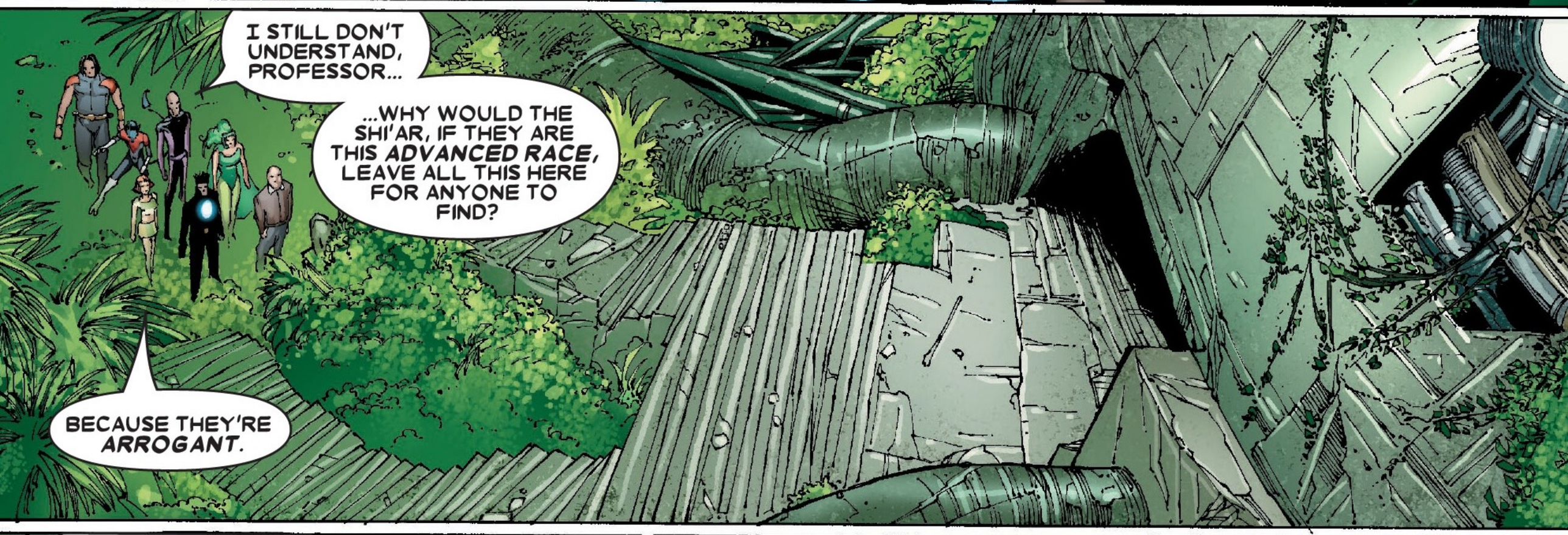
IMPERIAL SHOCKERS AWAKENED...

"IT'S NO WONDER HE KEPT HIS PAST TO HIMSELF... GABRIEL'S DAYS HERE MUST HAVE BEEN A *NIGHTMARE.*"

OBJECTIVE--FIND INTRUDERS AND DESTROY.

OBJECTIVE UNDERSTOOD.

HE'S A SUMMERS. AND A MUTANT.
WHAT OTHER KIND OF CHILDHOOD WOULD HE HAVE?
YOU DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH I WISH THAT WASN'T TRUE, ALEX...


I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND, PROFESSOR...
...WHY WOULD THE SHI'AR, IF THEY ARE THIS ADVANCED RACE, LEAVE ALL THIS HERE FOR ANYONE TO FIND?
BECAUSE THEY'RE ARROGANT.

I'M AFRAID THERE'S TRUTH IN WHAT RACHEL SAYS...BUT IT ALSO HAS TO DO WITH THEIR POLITICS.
WHEN DAVAN SHAKARI WAS HERE, D'KEN WAS THE EMPEROR.

BUT D'KEN WAS RENDERED CATATONIC, AND LILANDRA BECAME EMPRESS, THANKS IN PART TO THE X-MEN.
LILANDRA EVACUATED HER PEOPLE FROM EARTH, OUT OF RESPECT FOR THAT...AND OUT OF LOVE FOR ME.

LOVE WHICH HAS APPARENTLY DIMINISHED...ON HER END, AT LEAST.

SCANNING TARGETS... ANALYZING POWER LEVELS.
TARGETS GREEN AND BLACK, MOST DANGEROUS.
ORANGE TARGET NEXT.
THE REST WILL FALL QUICKLY. YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO.
PREPARING CHARGE.
FIRE.
FFoOOm
HOLD UP, I--
AAAAIIEEEE!
LORNA!
FRRZZTTT

THREE FIGURES, UP ABOVE. MOVING *FAST*!

I SEE THEM.

BAMF

DARWIN, STAY BY ME.

IT'S *KILLING* HER, PROFESSOR.

IT'S A COLLAPSING *ENERGY FIELD*, ALEX. IF YOU TOUCH HER, *YOU* CAN PROBABLY ABSORB MOST OF IT...

...BUT IT'S NOT *SOLAR*. YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO *CONTROL* IT...SO IT'LL HURT. A *LOT*.

AAAAAHHHHHHH!

JAMES! WATCH--

OUT!

WHOOB

UNH!

OKAY...SO YOU'RE *FASTER* THAN ME.

THAT'S NOT SUCH A BIG DEAL...

...I LIKE A CHALLENGE.

BAMF

KURT! I HAD HIM!

THESE ARE NOT LIKE THE SHI'AR DEATH COMMANDOS, RACHEL.

THEY SEEM TO FEEL NO PAIN.

I NEED YOU TO GET IN HIS HEAD.

BAMF

BAMF

BAMF

BAMF

FIND OUT HOW BEST TO STOP THEM!

I KNOW HOW TO--

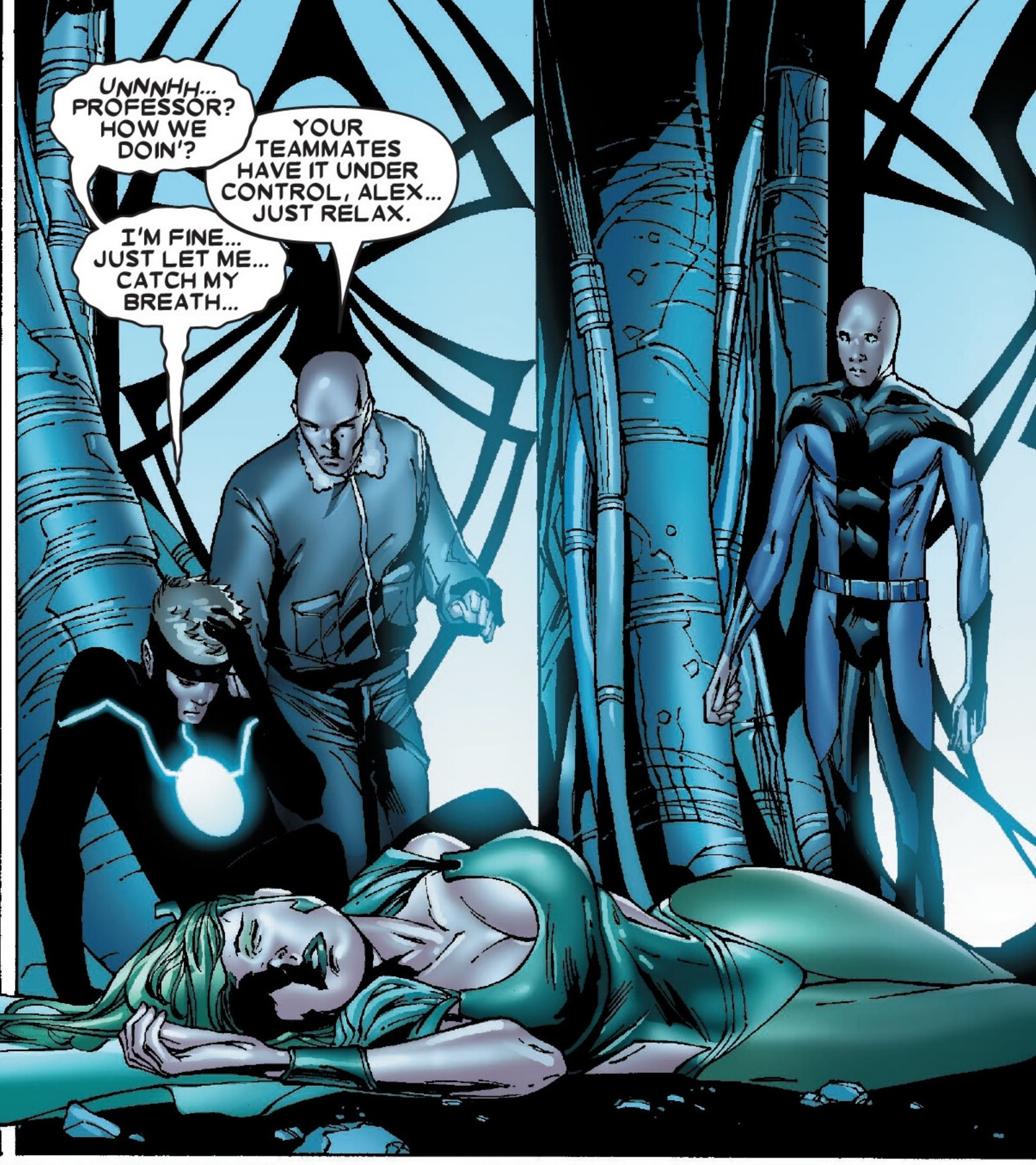
RACHEL!

OKAY.

LET ME IN, YOU TWISTED METAL FREAK...

THEY WANT TO DIE.
VAS?
THEY WERE PRISONERS. THE SHI'AR EXPERIMENTED ON THEM. TURNED THEM INTO THIS...
THERE ARE DEVICES IN THEIR BRAINS, KEEPING THEM ALIVE...
...BUT IN THE PART OF THEM THAT'S STILL FREE, BURIED DEEP INSIDE...THEY WANT TO DIE.
GOOD.
THEN IT'S MERCY.
SHHK-UT!

I SHOULD HELP... I'M NO GOOD JUST STANDING AROUND, PROFESSOR. I CAN--
NO. YOUR ADAPTIVE MUTATION IS MORE A DEFENSIVE SKILL, DARWIN.


UNNNHH... PROFESSOR? HOW WE DOIN'?
YOUR TEAMMATES HAVE IT UNDER CONTROL, ALEX... JUST RELAX.
I'M FINE... JUST LET ME... CATCH MY BREATH...

YOU ARE NOT DEAD... INTERESTING.
I WILL HAVE TO KILL YOU AGAIN.

YAAAAAHHHHH!
DARWIN! NOOO!

KRRAASHHH

WHAM!

HE'S FIGHTING ME, JAMES...HE'S MOVING, WATCH IT.
DON'T WORRY, RAY...

SHNK
...HIS FIGHT IS OVER.

BAMF
DARWIN! YOU'RE UNHARMED?
OF COURSE I AM.
I ADAPT, REMEMBER?

OH...AND I FOUND THE *SPACESHIP*, TOO.
JAMES?
DO *NOT* THINK WE WON'T DISCUSS THIS LATER.
THEY MAY HAVE BEEN *MOSTLY MACHINE*, BUT THE X-MEN *DO NOT* KILL.
I *MIGHT* AGREE WITH YOU, PROFESSOR. BUT THE WAY I SEE THIS ONE--
--I WAS JUST FREEING A SLAVE FROM ITS *TORMENT*.

FUEL IS GOOD, POWER STILL FULLY CHARGED...

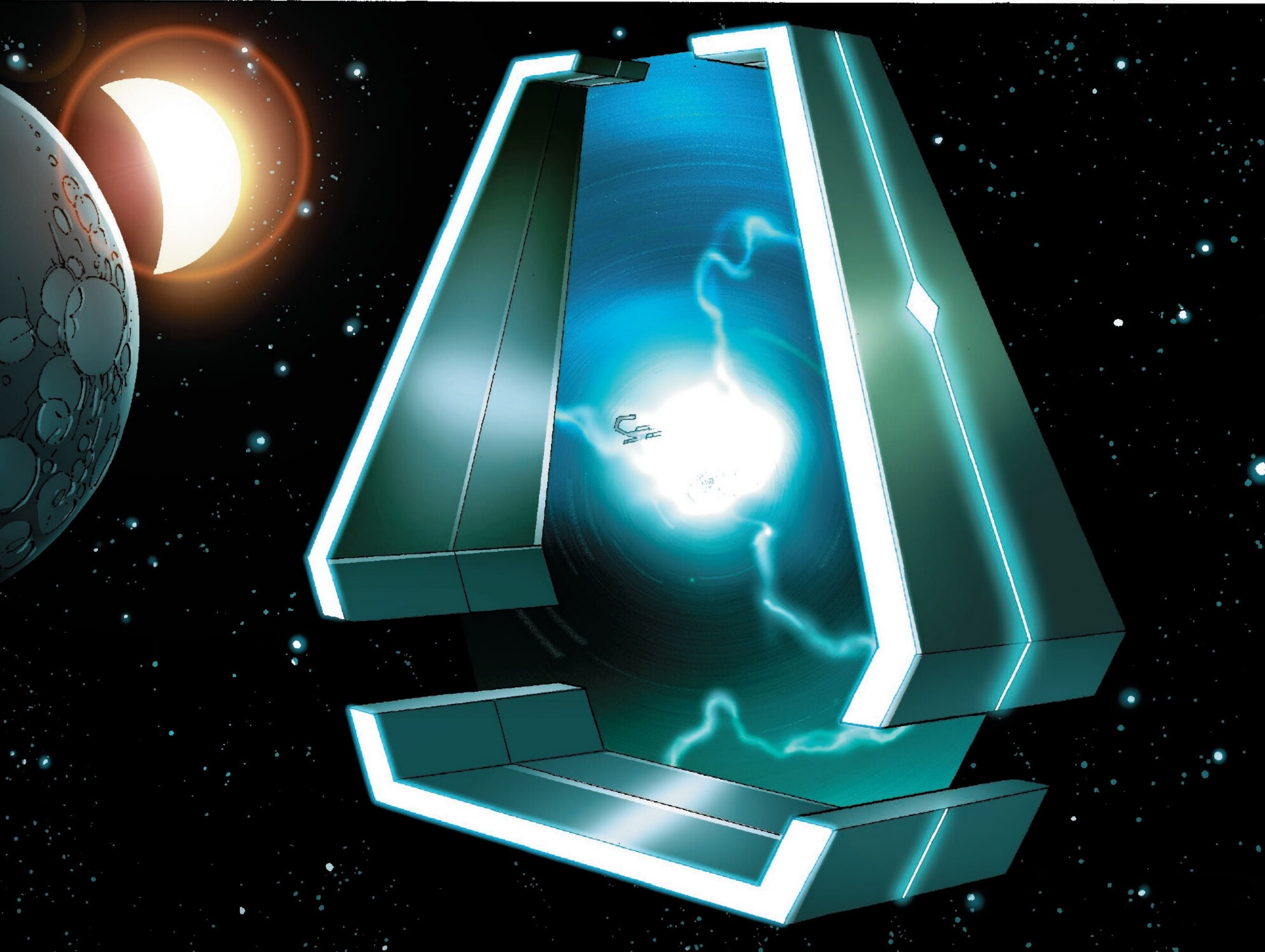
EVERYONE *STRAPPED IN?* AS I RECALL, THESE EARLIER SHI'AR SHIPS ARE A BIT *ROUGH* ON TAKEOFF.

WE'RE ALL *READY*, PROFESSOR. LET US LEAVE THIS TERRIBLE PLACE.

OH MAN... THIS IS *SO COOL.*

ACCORDING TO THE CHARTS, WE HIT THE FIRST STARGATE BEYOND THE MOON, THEN IT'S FOUR MORE JUMPS TO SHI'AR SPACE.
WHAT IS THAT IN *REAL TIME?*
IT'S ABOUT A DAY'S TRAVEL BETWEEN MOST STARGATES.

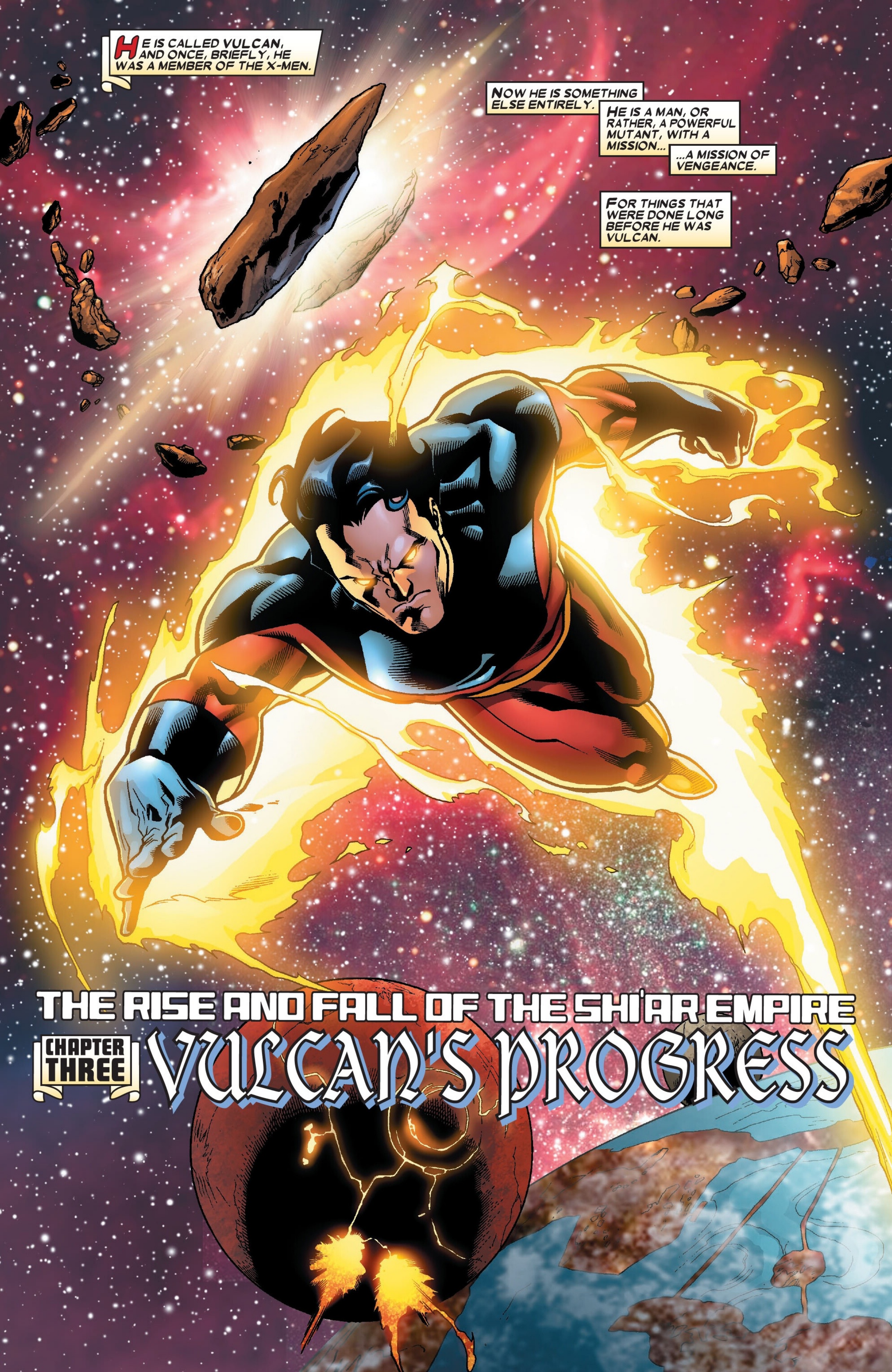
THIS SHIP CAN ACCESS THEM WITHOUT ANY HACKING, BECAUSE IT'S FROM THEIR FLEET.
SO WE SHOULD PASS UNNOTICED UNTIL WE CAN GET A MESSAGE OUT TO YOUR FATHER...
IS THAT *IT*, PROFESSOR? IS *THAT* THE STARGATE?
YES...IT'LL TAKE US TO THE NEXT POINT ON THE SHI'AR CHARTS, *FAR OUTSIDE* OUR OWN GALAXY.



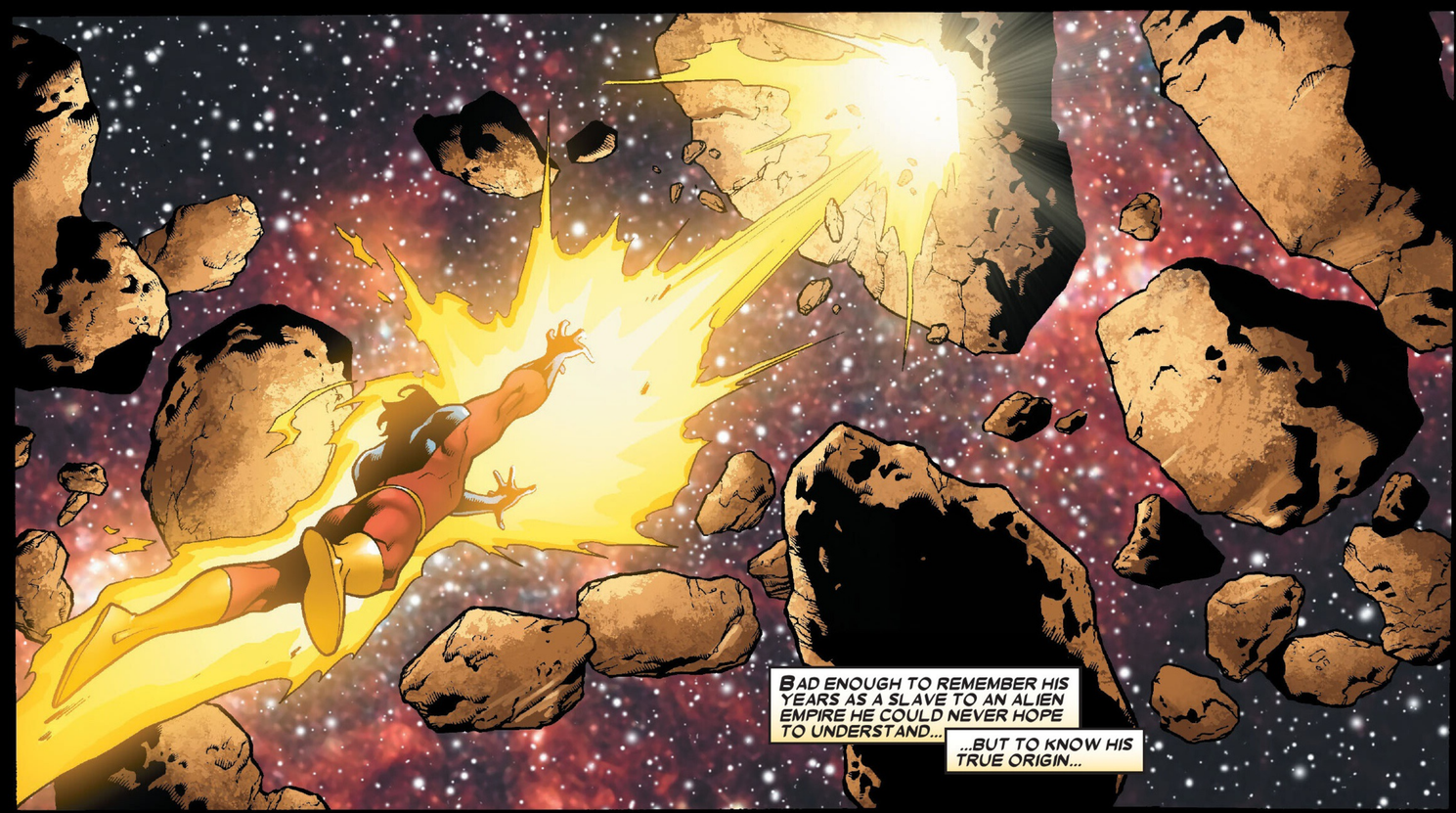
AUTO-PILOT SHOULD TRACK TO THE NEXT JUMPGATE, ALEX, BUT CHECK THE CHARTS TO MAKE SURE, WOULD YOU?
NO PROBLEM... I'M STARTING TO GET THE HANG OF THIS, ACTUALLY.
RACHEL, DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT?
WHAT I SAW IN THAT POOR MAN'S MIND...THE SHI'AR ARE MONSTERS, PROFESSOR.
THEY WERE, YES... AND THEY COULD EASILY BE AGAIN. THAT'S--
PROFESSOR! WE'VE GOT A PROBLEM.
I'M NOT GETTING A READING FOR THE NEXT STARGATE, OR ANY OF THE OTHER ONES IN THIS SECTOR...
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
ACCORDING TO THE COMPUTER, THE JUMPGATES HAVE BEEN DESTROYED.
MY GOD... IT'S VULCAN. IT HAS TO BE.
HE'S STRANDED US...

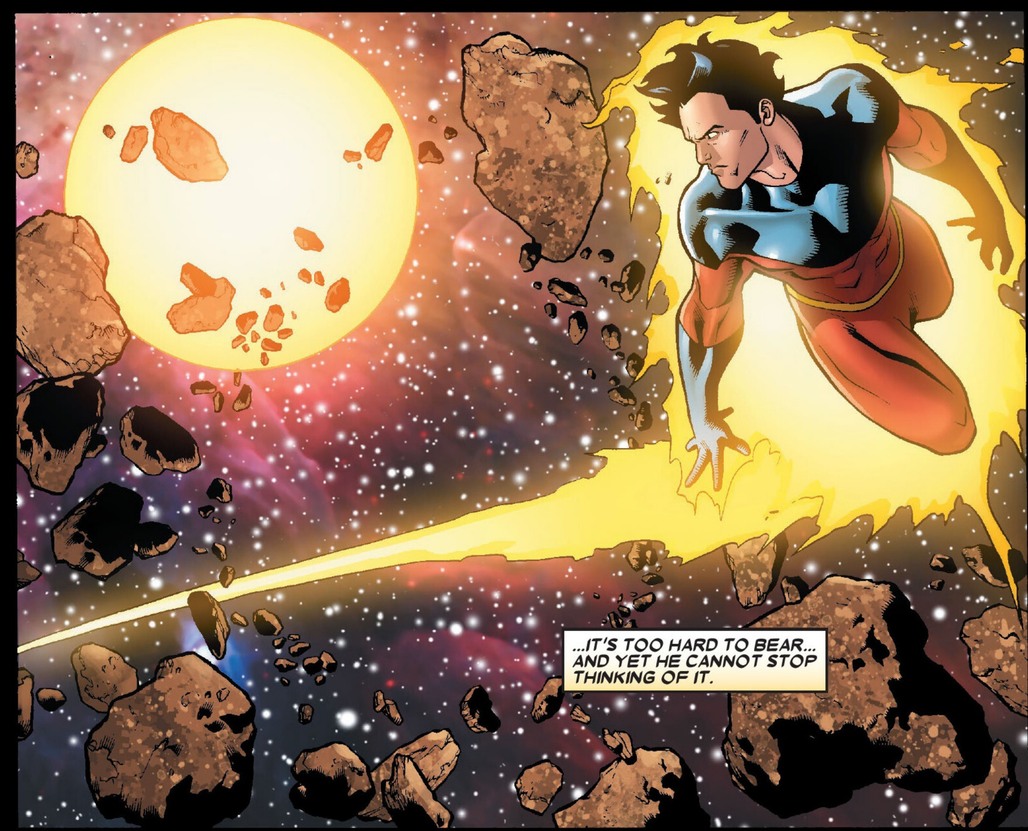
UNCANNY X-MEN #475 sketch variant by BILLY TAN

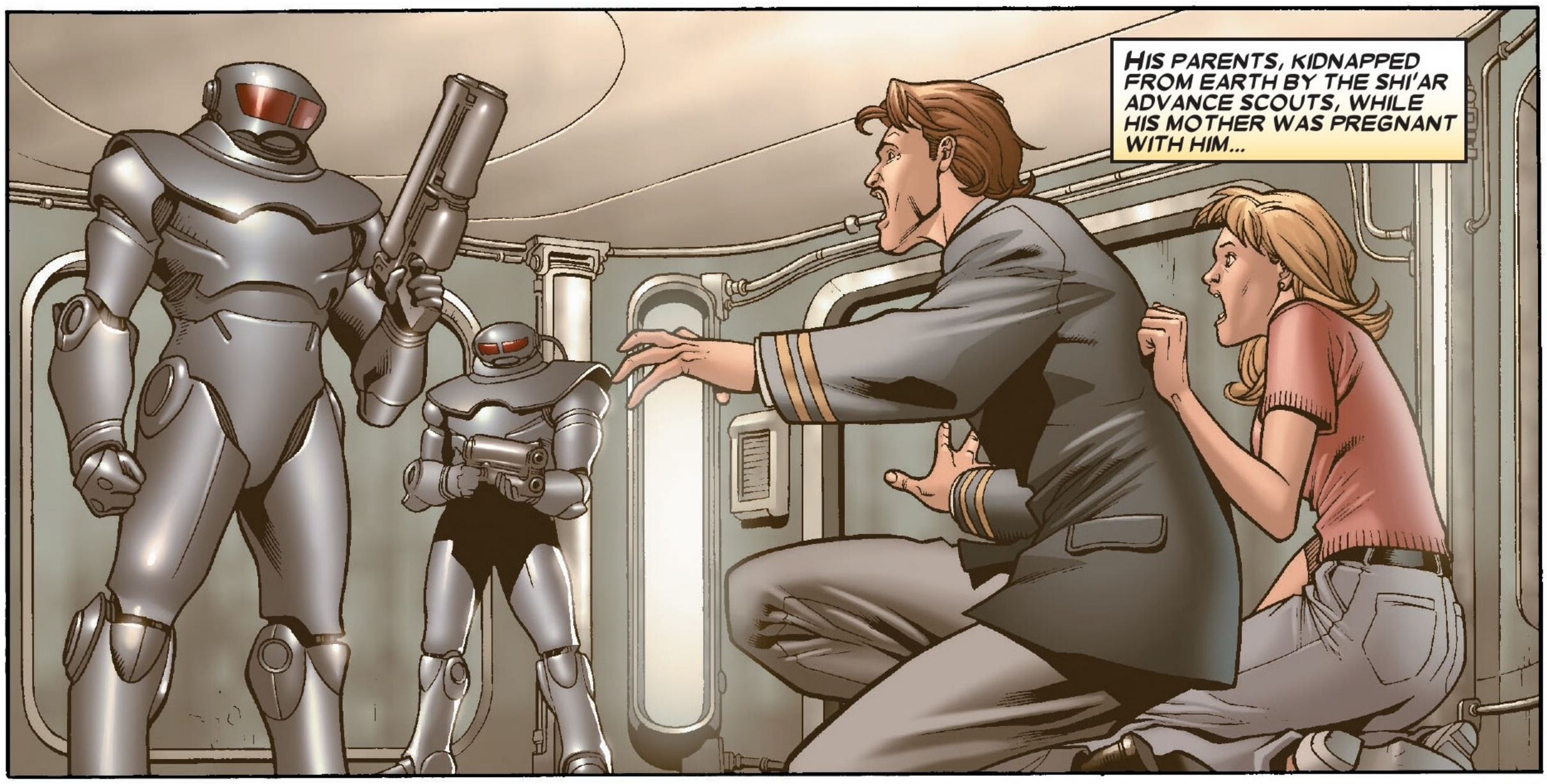
UNCANNY X-MEN 477


HE IS CALLED VULCAN, AND ONCE, BRIEFLY, HE WAS A MEMBER OF THE X-MEN.
NOW HE IS SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY.
HE IS A MAN, OR RATHER, A POWERFUL MUTANT, WITH A MISSION...
...A MISSION OF VENGEANCE.
FOR THINGS THAT WERE DONE LONG BEFORE HE WAS VULCAN.
THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SHI'AR EMPIRE
CHAPTER THREE
VULCAN'S PROGRESS

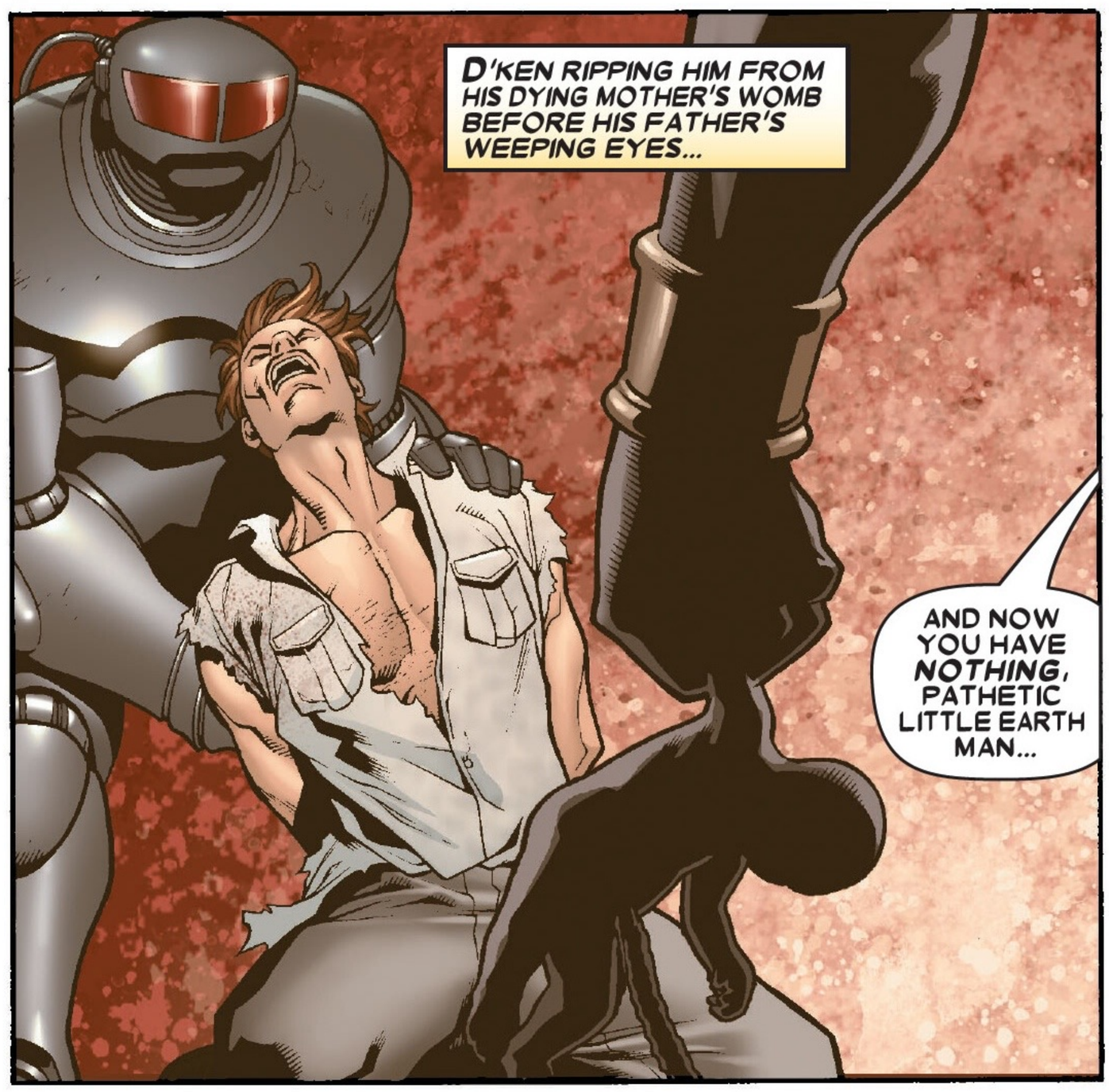
FOR THERE WAS A TIME, BEFORE THE ANGER THAT FEEDS HIM NOW, WHEN HE WAS INNOCENT...
...WHEN HE WAS A CHILD KNOWN AS GABRIEL...GABRIEL SUMMERS.
EVEN THINKING THAT NAME IS LIKE A KNIFE IN HIS THOUGHTS.

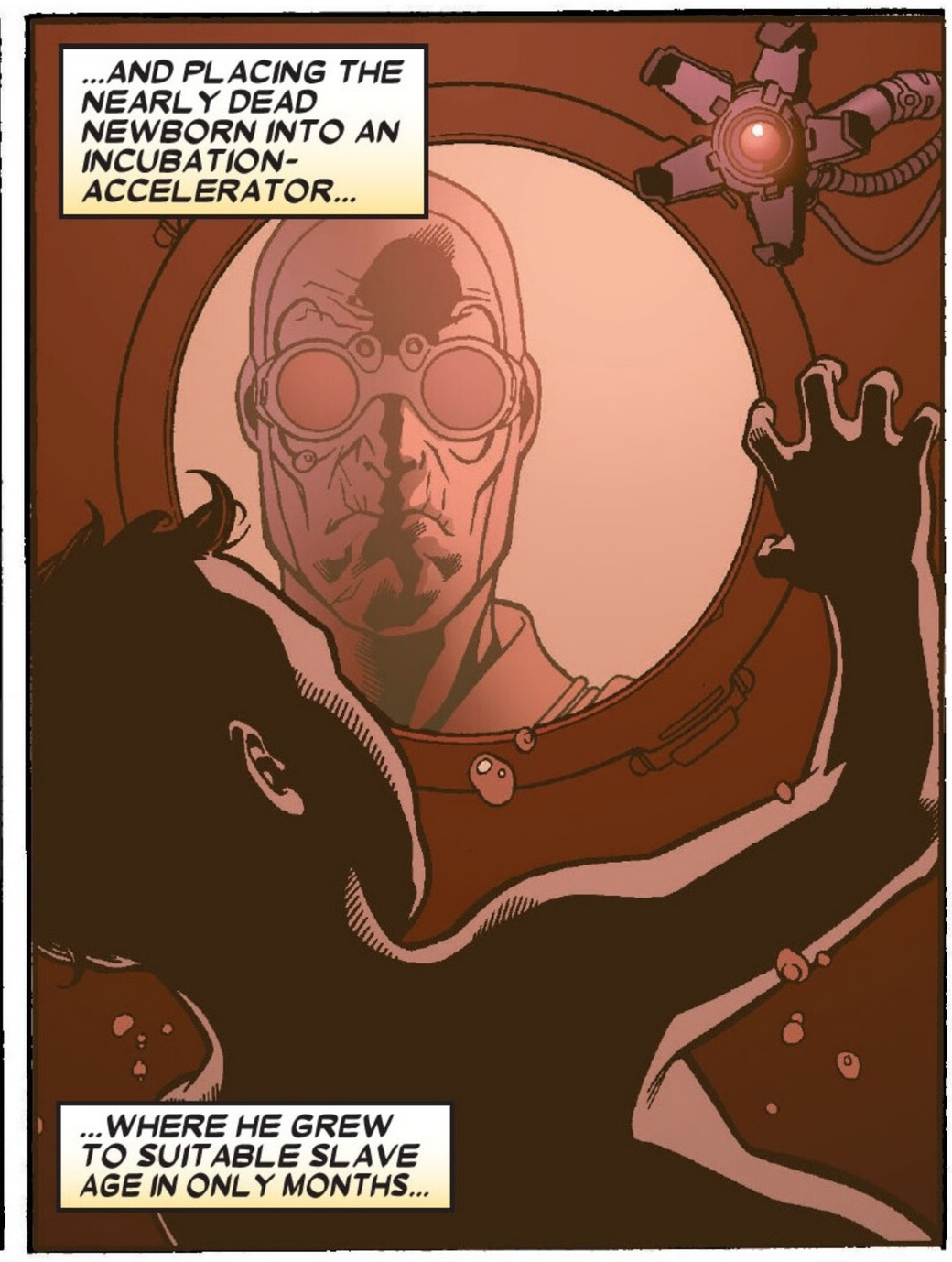

BAD ENOUGH TO REMEMBER HIS YEARS AS A SLAVE TO AN ALIEN EMPIRE HE COULD NEVER HOPE TO UNDERSTAND...
...BUT TO KNOW HIS TRUE ORIGIN...


...IT'S TOO HARD TO BEAR... AND YET HE CANNOT STOP THINKING OF IT.


HIS PARENTS, KIDNAPPED FROM EARTH BY THE SHI'AR ADVANCE SCOUTS, WHILE HIS MOTHER WAS PREGNANT WITH HIM...

HIS FATHER'S DOOMED ATTEMPT TO SAVE HER AND HIS SOON-TO-BE-BORN CHILD FROM THE EVIL EMPEROR D'KEN...
OUT OF MY WAY!
I'LL KILL YOU ALL IF I HAVE TO!


D'KEN RIPPING HIM FROM HIS DYING MOTHER'S WOMB BEFORE HIS FATHER'S WEEPING EYES...
AND NOW YOU HAVE NOTHING, PATHETIC LITTLE EARTH MAN...


...AND PLACING THE NEARLY DEAD NEWBORN INTO AN INCUBATION-ACCELERATOR...
...WHERE HE GREW TO SUITABLE SLAVE AGE IN ONLY MONTHS...

TO KNOW THESE THINGS WERE TRUE WOULD BE ENOUGH TO DRIVE MOST MEN TO DISASTER...
...BUT TO ACTUALLY SEE THESE IMAGES IN YOUR OWN MEMORY, TO SEE YOUR OWN PERVERTED BIRTH IN THE SHI'AR THRONE ROOM...
...TO HAVE THE IMAGE OF A MADMAN LAUGHING OVER YOUR MOTHER'S BLOODY CORPSE BURNED INTO YOUR MIND...

...IS ENOUGH TO DRIVE A MAN LIKE VULCAN ACROSS THE GREAT BLACKNESS OF SPACE...
...TO FIND THIS EMPEROR D'KEN AND MAKE HIM PAY.

BUT WITH EACH PASSING DAY, HE WISHES AGAIN AND AGAIN THAT HE'D NOT BEEN SUCH A FOOL.
THAT HE'D NEVER ALLOWED MARVEL GIRL AND PROFESSOR XAVIER TO SHOW HIM HOW HE CAME TO BE...
NO! THAT ISN'T--

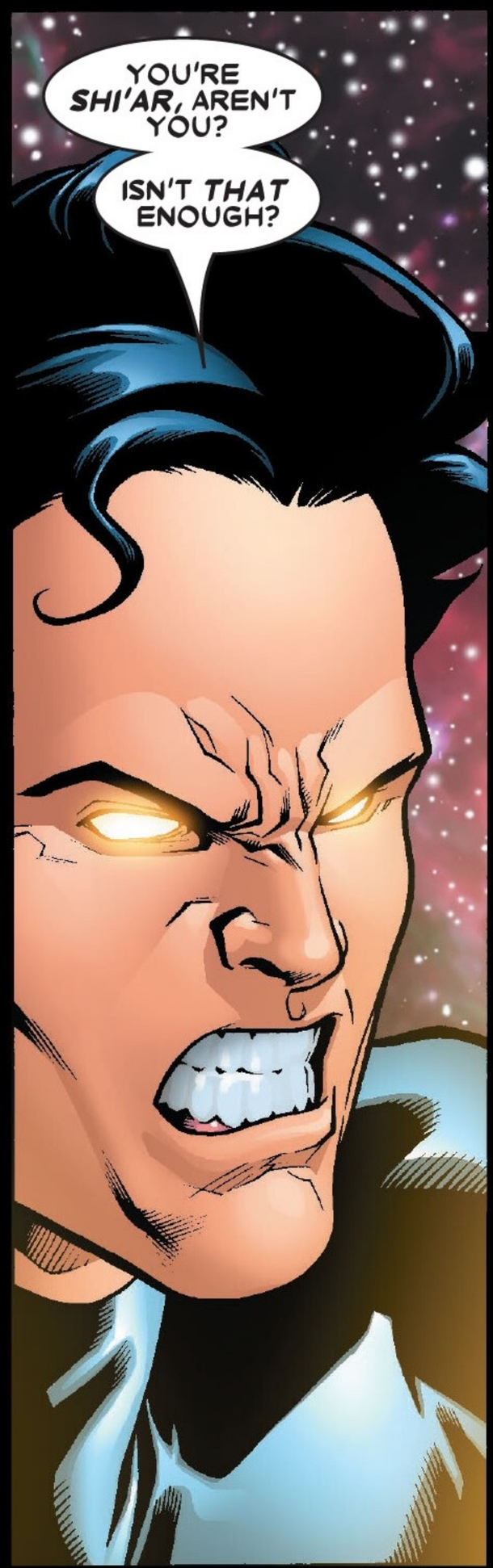
...BECAUSE HE CANNOT WASH THESE IMAGES AWAY.
SO HE WILL HAVE TO BURN THEM OUT, INSTEAD.

He has lost track of the days by the time he encounters his first Shi'ar vessel.
But it has been at least a week, he is sure, since he escaped Earth.
They are unprepared for him.
He's been counting on that.

IT'S ALMOST TOO EASY, THOUGH.
THERE MUST BE MORE TO THESE SHI'AR THAN THIS.

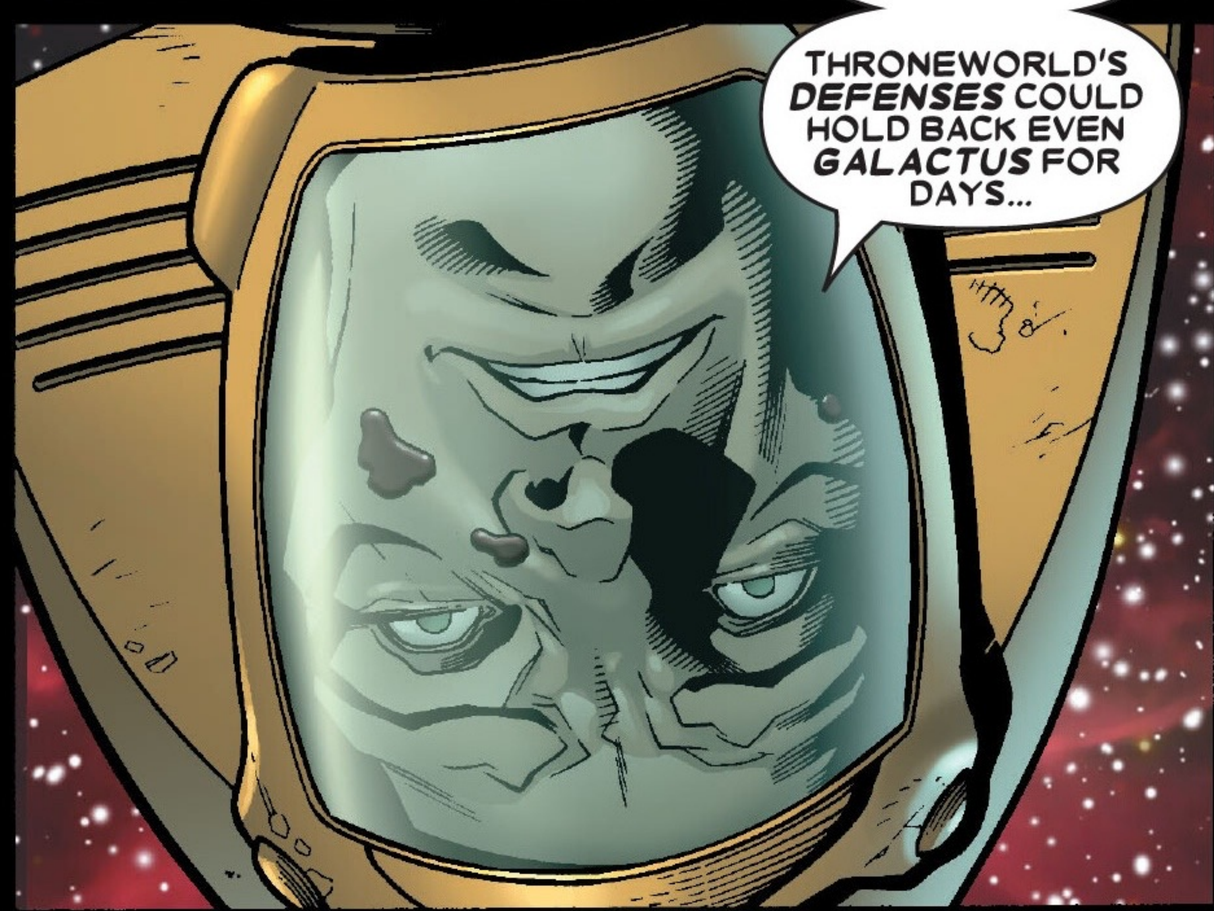
YOU. DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?
Y-Y-YES...SHI'AR GALAXIANS LEARN NEARLY EVERY SPOKEN LANGUAGE... BUT HOW IS IT YOU SPEAK IN THE EMPTINESS?
MY VOICE IS PURE ENERGY, TRANSMITTING TO YOUR COMMUNICATOR.

WHY...WHY HAVE YOU ATTACKED US?
WE WERE NOT A WARSHIP...


YOU'RE SHI'AR, AREN'T YOU?
ISN'T THAT ENOUGH?

BUT...THE SHI'AR EMPIRE NO LONGER PRESENTS A THREAT TO EARTH...
AND THAT'S SUPPOSED TO ERASE THE THINGS YOU PEOPLE HAVE DONE?
I DON'T THINK SO.

NOW, IF YOU WANT TO LIVE, TELL ME HOW *FAR* IT IS TO THE SHI'AR *THRONEWORLD*.
YOU WILL *NEVER* MAKE IT TO CHANDILAR ALIVE, EARTHER...


THRONEWORLD'S *DEFENSES* COULD HOLD BACK EVEN *GALACTUS* FOR DAYS...

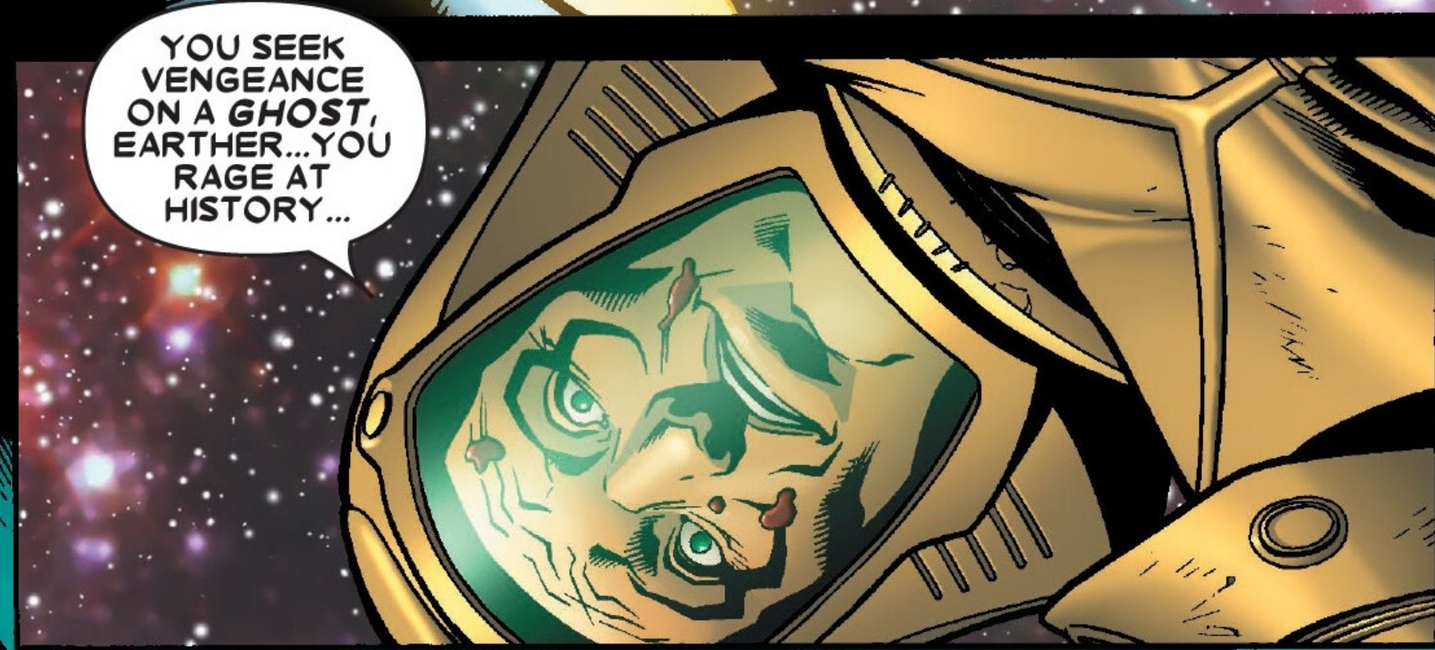
IS THAT YOUR *ANSWER?* YOU'D RATHER DIE FOR YOUR CORRUPT EMPIRE?
NO...NO... I WILL TELL WHAT YOU ASK...

EVEN AT YOUR SPEED, IT WOULD YET TAKE SEVERAL CYCLES-- *YEARS* --TO REACH CHANDILAR...
THE STARGATES ARE THE ONLY WAY TO ARRIVE MORE SWIFTLY...
STARGATES? WHERE ARE THEY?
HOW DO I *USE* THEM?

ONLY *SHI'AR* VESSELS MAY ACTIVATE THE GATES...
A MAN ALONE... FLYING UNDER HIS OWN POWER THROUGH THE HEAVENLY TERRAIN... AS WONDROUS AS YOU MAY BE...
...THE STARGATES WILL *NOT* OPEN FOR YOU.

THEN I'LL HAVE TO FIND ANOTHER SHIP...BECAUSE I HAVE *BUSINESS* WITH YOUR EMPEROR D'KEN...
...AND I DON'T INTEND TO WAIT *YEARS* TO SETTLE IT.

D'KEN? YOU HAVE WAITED TOO LONG *ALREADY*...D'KEN HAS LAIN IN THE SLEEP OF THE *NEAR-DEAD* FOR MANY CYCLES...
...LILANDRA IS EMPRESS OF SHI'AR.
WHAT?


YOU SEEK VENGEANCE ON A *GHOST*, EARTHER...YOU RAGE AT HISTORY...

NO...I RAGE AT YOU.

YYYEEIIIIAAAAGGGGG!

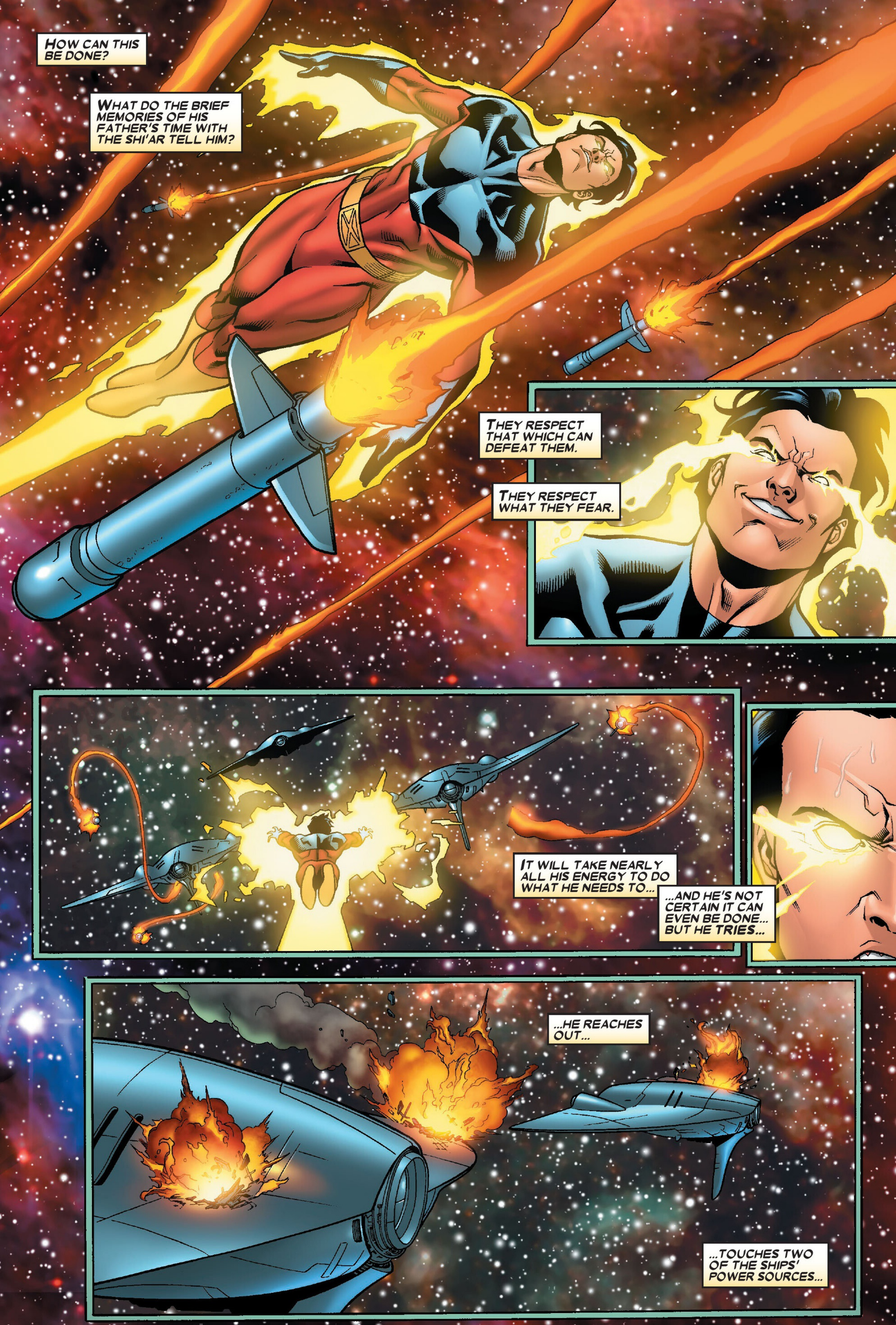
I'LL STILL HAVE MY REVENGE. IF NOT ON D'KEN, THEN ON HIS PEOPLE...AND THIS LILANDRA...
SHE TOOK HIS PLACE. NOW IT'LL COST HER.
BUT FIRST, LIKE THIS FOOL SAID, I NEED A SHIP...
THROUGH HIS EXPOSURE TO A MASSIVE AMOUNT OF MUTANT ENERGY, VULCAN WAS NOT ONLY AWAKENED FROM HIS OWN NEAR-DEATH STATE...
...BUT HIS ABILITIES WERE ELEVATED TO OMEGA-LEVEL.
NOW HE REMEMBERS HIS TRAINING, REMEMBERS THE WORDS OF PROFESSOR XAVIER...
...AND HIS SENSES REACH OUT THROUGH THE BLACKNESS AROUND HIM...SEARCHING...
...UNTIL HE FEELS THEIR POWER CELLS PULSING IN THE DISTANCE...
THE SLOW HEARTBEAT OF THREE SHI'AR VESSELS AT WORK.

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL IS A SIMPLE TASK FROM THAT POINT.
BUT THESE VESSELS ARE WARSHIPS.
AND THEY DON'T HESITATE TO ATTACK.

THIS WILL BE A FIGHT, AT LEAST.

THESE MEN WILL EARN THEIR DEATHS.

BUT HE NEEDS ONE SHIP TO SURVIVE THIS BATTLE.
AND HE NEEDS ITS CREW TO SERVE HIM OF THEIR OWN WILL.


HOW CAN THIS BE DONE?
WHAT DO THE BRIEF MEMORIES OF HIS FATHER'S TIME WITH THE SHI'AR TELL HIM?
THEY RESPECT THAT WHICH CAN DEFEAT THEM.
THEY RESPECT WHAT THEY FEAR.
IT WILL TAKE NEARLY ALL HIS ENERGY TO DO WHAT HE NEEDS TO...
...AND HE'S NOT CERTAIN IT CAN EVEN BE DONE... BUT HE TRIES...
...HE REACHES OUT...
...TOUCHES TWO OF THE SHIPS' POWER SOURCES...

...AND HE SHUTS THEM DOWN, COMPLETELY.
WEAPONS, LIFE SUPPORT, AND ARTIFICIAL GRAVITY...
THEN THE POWER TO THE ENGINES GOES QUIET...
...AND TWO WARSHIPS GO DARK...DRIFTING TOWARD EACH OTHER SWIFTLY...
...UNTIL THE JOB IS DONE.

WITH THE LITTLE HE HAS LEFT IN HIM, HE SENDS HIS VOICE THROUGH THE COMM SYSTEM OF THE SURVIVING SHIP...

...PRAYING THEY DON'T REALIZE HE'S TOO WEAK NOW TO DO THEM ANY HARM.

HAIL TO THE SHI'AR WARSHIP! YOU HAVE TWO CHOICES--

--YOU CAN JOIN YOUR COMPANIONS IN DEATH--

--OR YOU CAN SURRENDER YOUR VESSEL TO MY COMMAND.

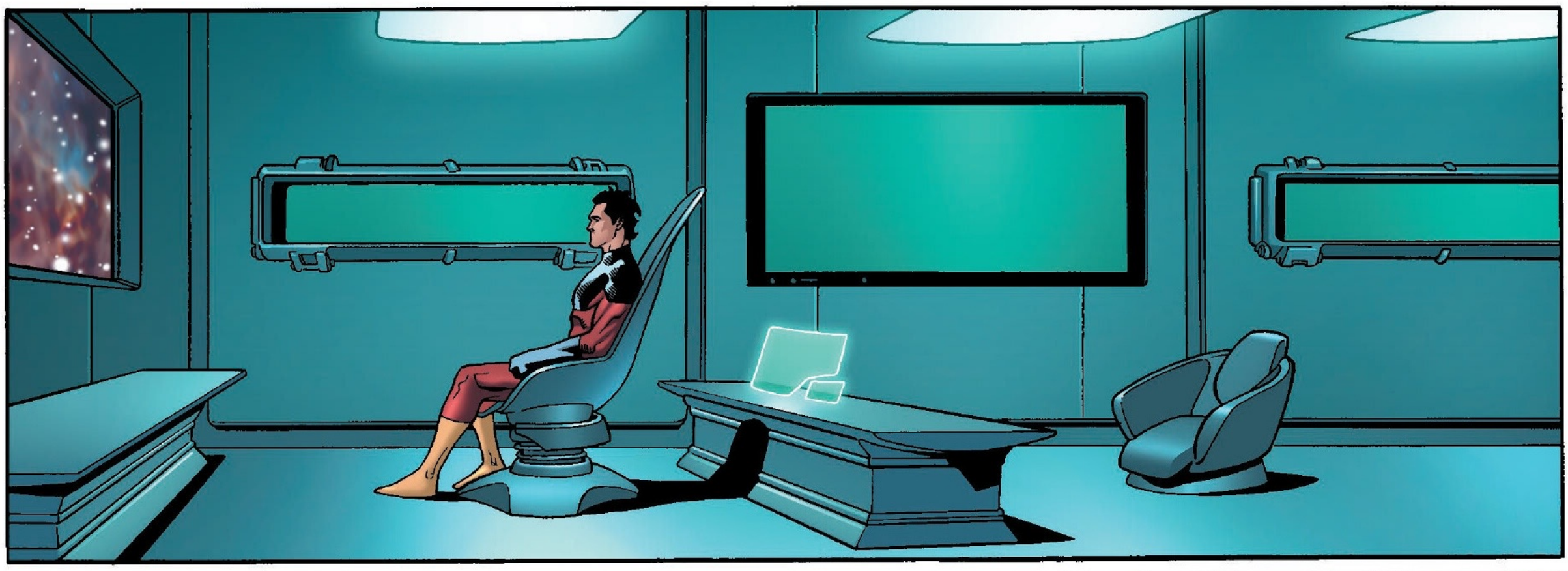
YOU HAVE ONE MINUTE TO DECIDE.

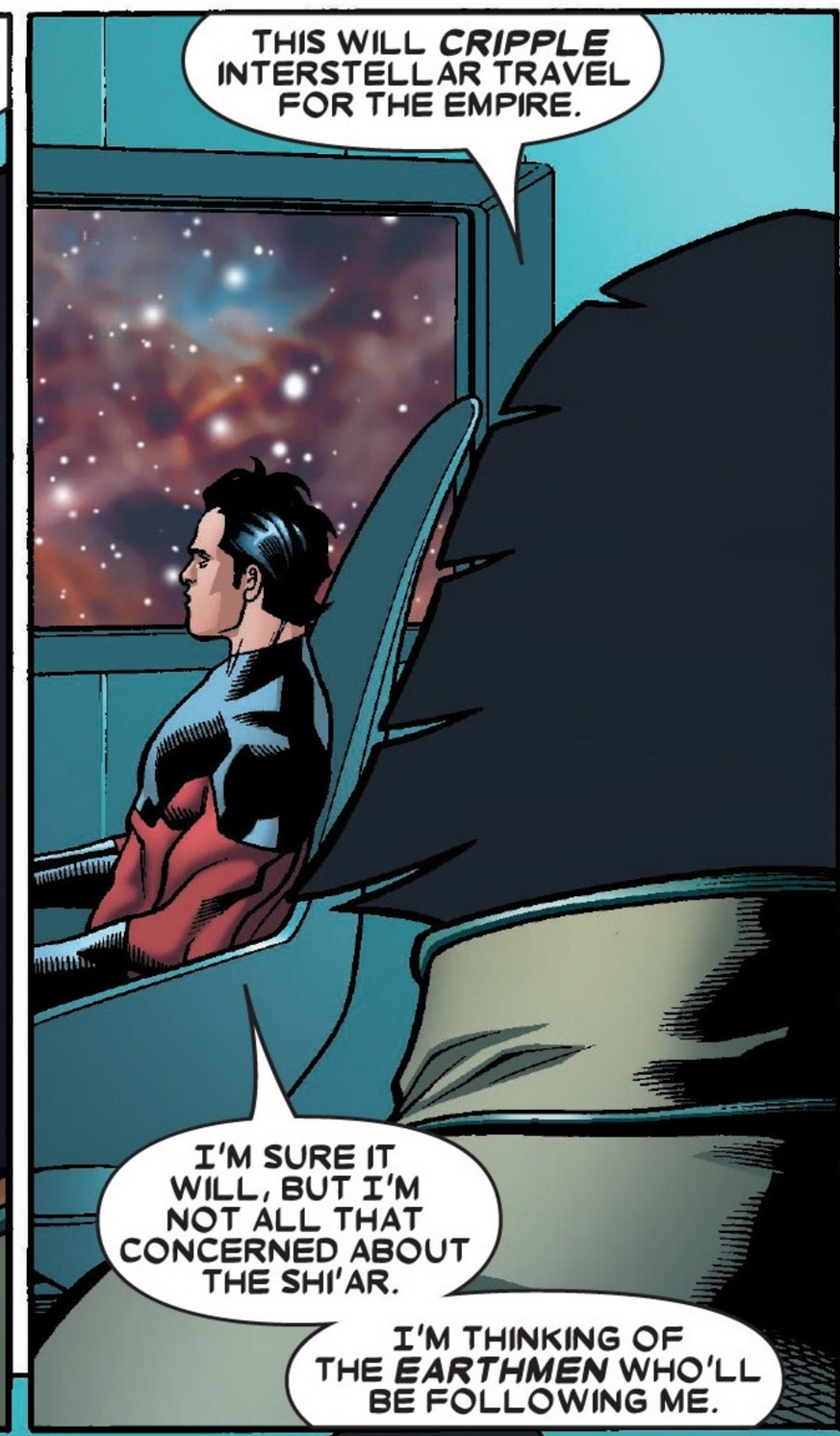
CAPTAIN? WHAT DO WE DO...?

WHAT CAN WE DO?

WE ARE DEFEATED.

HAIL, GREAT WARRIOR...
...OUR WARBIRD IS YOURS, WON THROUGH THE TEST OF COMBAT.
KEEP THE SWORD, CAPTAIN.
I DON'T NEED ONE...
...AND YOU MIGHT WANT TO FALL ON IT AT SOME POINT IN THE NEAR FUTURE.





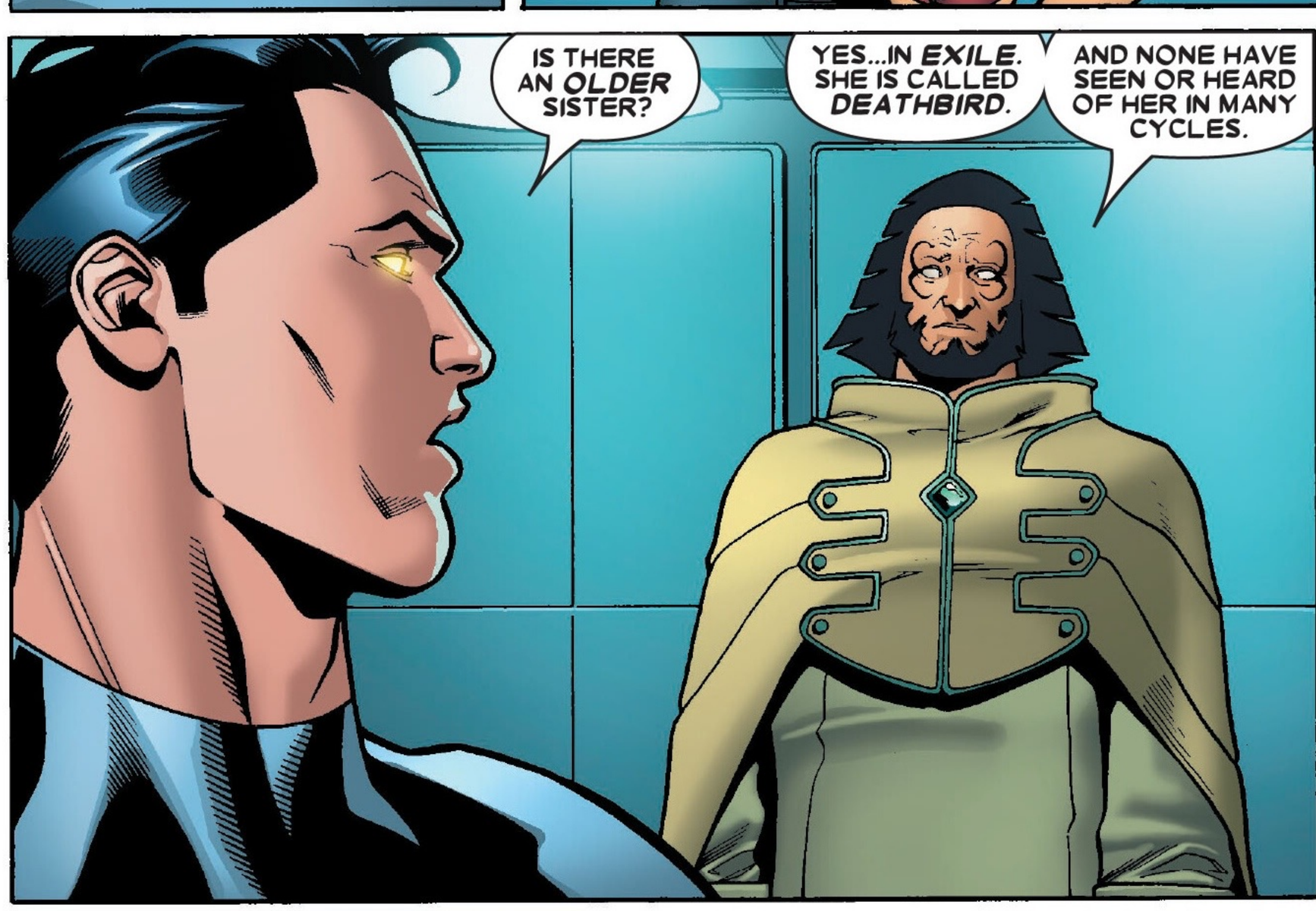
EARTHERS *CANNOT* ACCESS THE GATES.

YOU DON'T KNOW *THESE* EARTHERS, CAPTAIN...JUST DO IT.

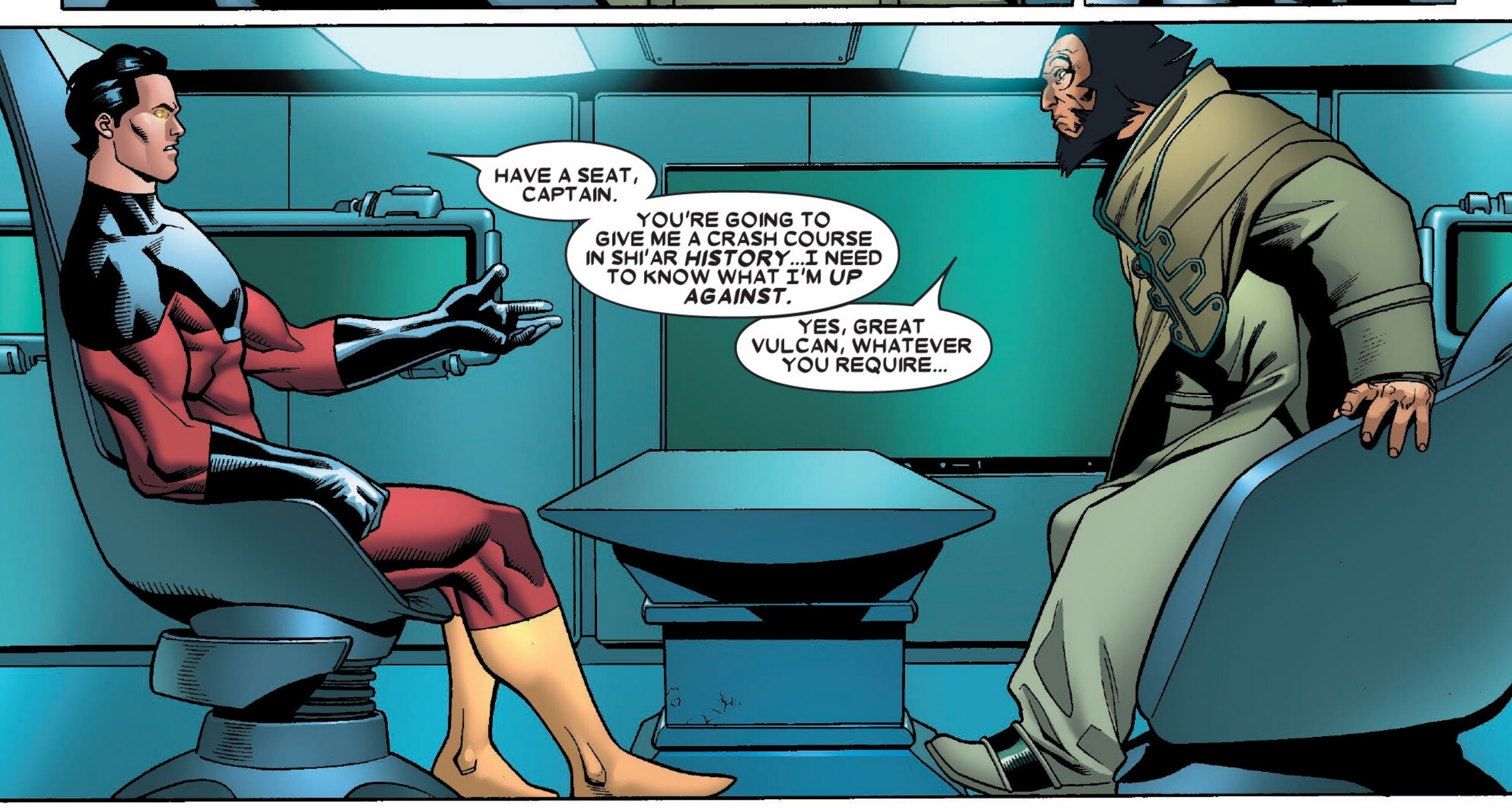
YOUR WILL IS *LAW*, GREAT VULCAN.

I REALLY LIKE THE SOUND OF THAT.

SO, CAPTAIN... TELL ME ABOUT THIS LILANDRA, YOUR EMPRESS.
LILANDRA INHERITED THE THRONE WHEN GREAT EMPEROR D'KEN WAS TAKEN BY ILLNESS. SHE IS THE YOUNGEST SISTER OF THE NERAMANI LINE.


IS THERE AN OLDER SISTER?
YES...IN EXILE. SHE IS CALLED DEATHBIRD.
AND NONE HAVE SEEN OR HEARD OF HER IN MANY CYCLES.

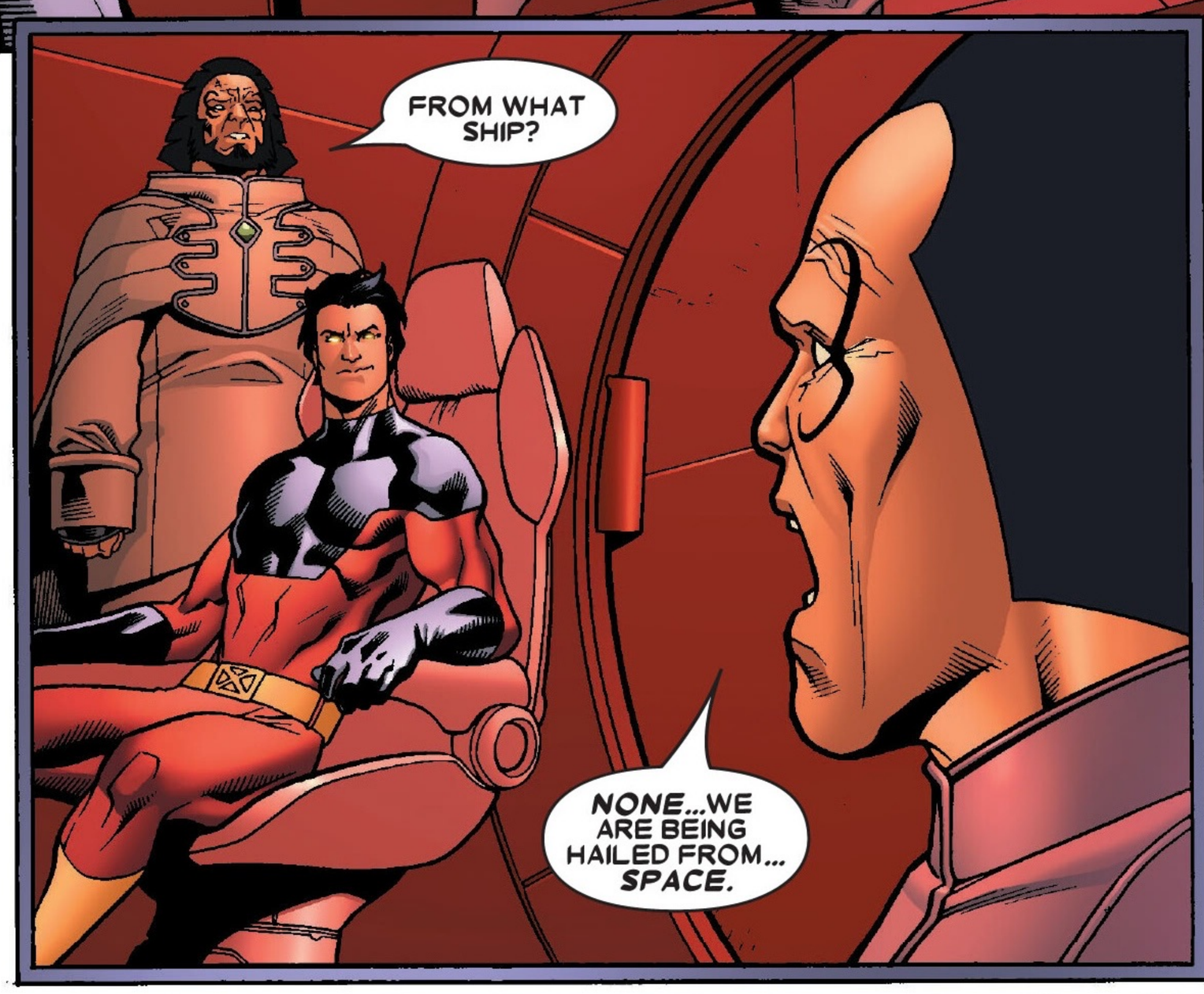
BUT IT IS BELIEVED THAT SHE STILL LIVES.
INTERESTING...


HAVE A SEAT, CAPTAIN.
YOU'RE GOING TO GIVE ME A CRASH COURSE IN SHI'AR HISTORY...I NEED TO KNOW WHAT I'M UP AGAINST.
YES, GREAT VULCAN, WHATEVER YOU REQUIRE...

DAYS PASS, AND VULCAN'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE SHI'AR GROWS WITH EACH OF THEM...
...WHILE HIS SHIP PROGRESSES THROUGH THE OUTER TERRITORIES OF SHI'AR SPACE...SPREADING DESTRUCTION IN ITS WAKE.
AND FROM HIS SEAT ON THE COMMAND DECK, VULCAN WATCHES...
...KNOWING THAT HIS LEGEND IS SPREADING WITH EACH ATTACK.
KNOWING THAT RUMOR AND FEAR OF HIS APPROACH HAS BY NOW REACHED THE THRONEWORLD.
KNOWING HE'S CREATED A PERFECT PLAN.
LIKE THAT OF HIS HERO, JULIUS CAESAR.

SIR, WE ARE NOW IN THE *INNER REALMS* OF THE SHI'AR EMPIRE.
BLOW THE GATE.
YOUR WORD IS LAW.

NOW, PREPARE TO REPEL BOARDERS.
BUT THERE ARE NO SHIPS IN SCANNING RANGE, SIR...WHO COULD--
WE ARE BEING *HAILED*.


FROM WHAT SHIP?
NONE...WE ARE BEING HAILED FROM... *SPACE*.

I THOUGHT AS MUCH...PUT THEM ON THE COMM...

YES, GREAT VULCAN.
CAPTAIN OF THE SHI'AR WARBIRD M'KAEDO...YOU ARE GUILTY OF TREASON AGAINST THE IMPERIUM...

YOU ARE HEREBY ORDERED TO SURRENDER YOUR VESSEL AND TURN YOURSELF IN FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT...
...OR FACE THE WRATH OF THE
IMPERIAL GUARD!

UNCANNY X-MEN 478

CHANDILAR, THRONEWORLD OF THE SHI'AR EMPIRE
IMPERIAL MINISTRY BUILDING

VICE-CHANCELLOR K'TOR?

YES, COMMANDER N'RUTO, COME IN.

WHAT *NEWS?*

THE *IMPERIAL GUARD* HAVE BEEN DISPATCHED TO CONFRONT THE ROGUE WARSHIP. WITH LUCK, THEY SHOULD MAKE CONTACT IN THE NEXT DAY.

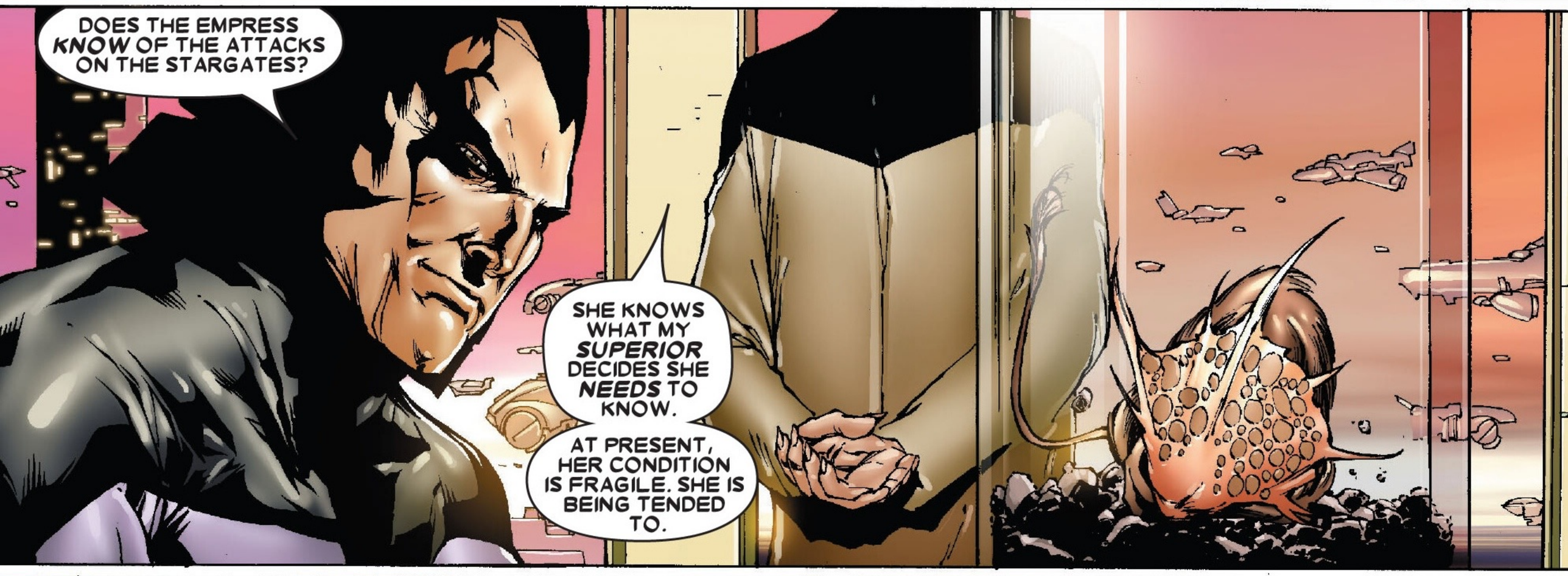
AND THE *STARGATES?* WHAT IS THE *DAMAGE* ASSESSMENT?

FIFTY-FIVE PERCENT HAVE BEEN *COMPLETELY* DESTROYED...

ALONG WITH THE SUPPORT SHIPS AND *CREWS* MAINTAINING THEM.

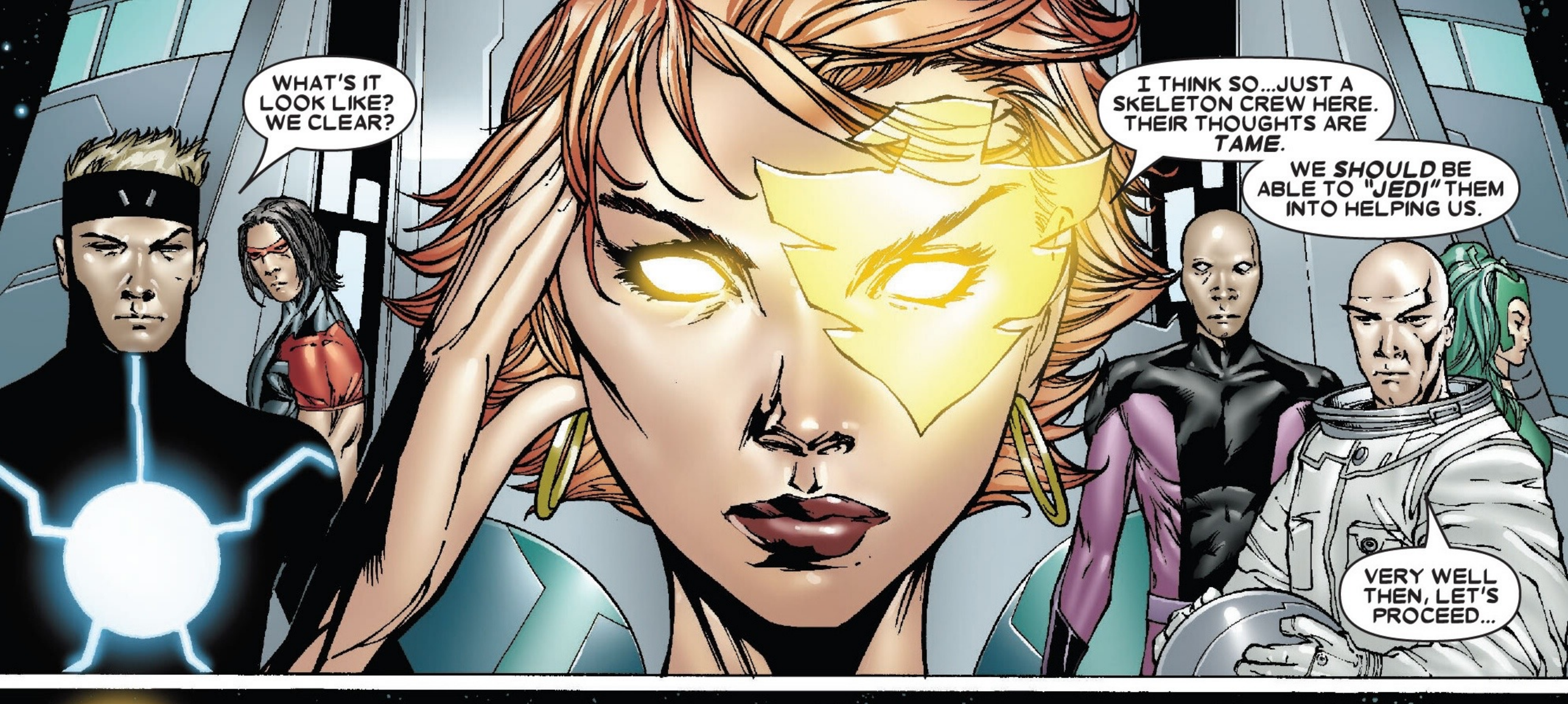
DAMN THE STARS...WE JUST FINISHED REBUILDING THE NETWORK AFTER THE EARTHER'S TREACHERY...
THE EMPRESS PROCLAIMED XAVIER *INNOCENT* IN THAT MATTER.
BECAUSE SHE WAS *ASHAMED*.

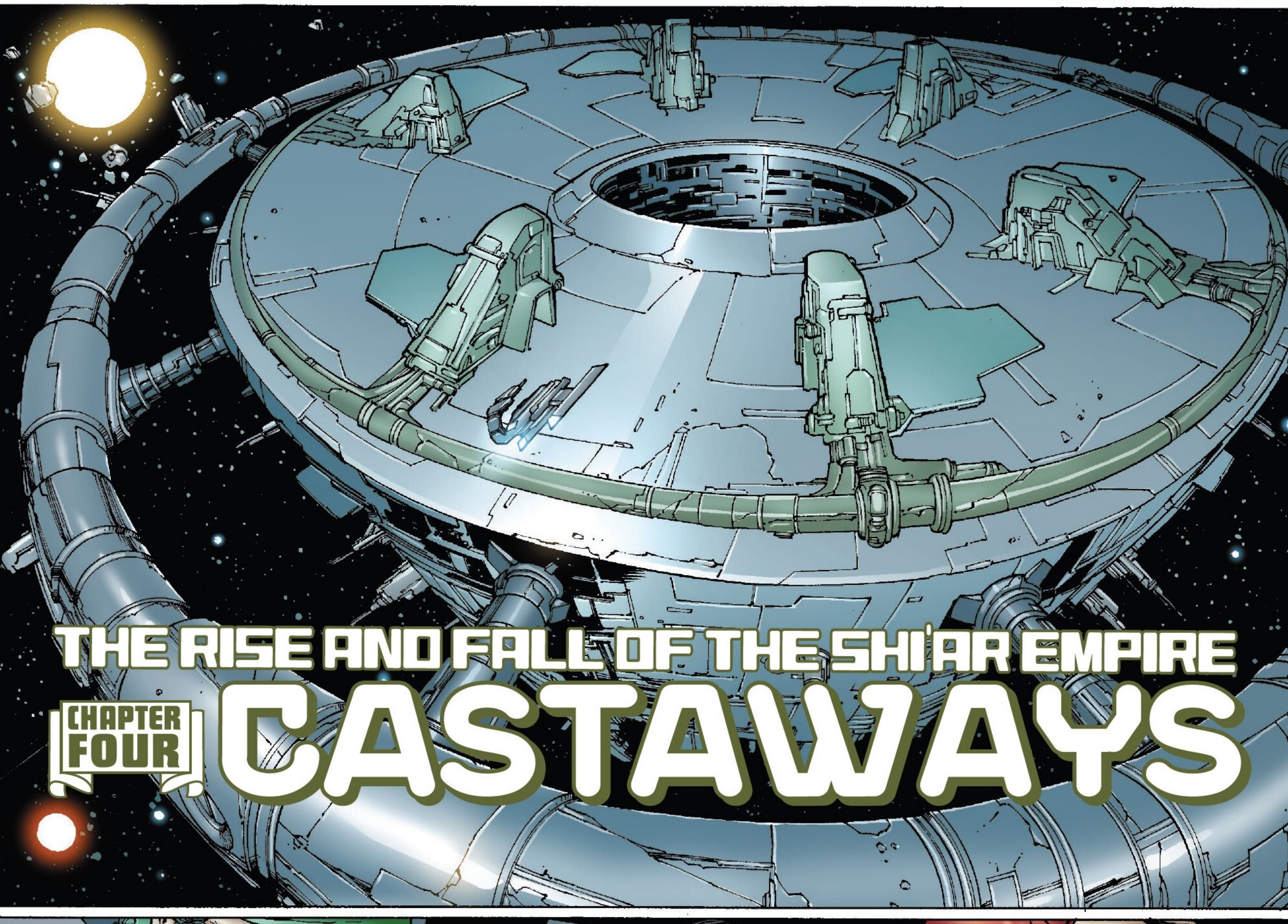
HE WAS HER *CONSORT* AND HE USED HIS *MIND CONTROL* TO MANIPULATE HER INTO NEARLY *DESTROYING* HER OWN REALM.
IT WAS ONLY THROUGH THE *MINISTRY'S* PRESSURE THAT SHE *DISSOLVED* THEIR UNION AND WE WERE ABLE TO HAVE XAVIER *BANISHED*.

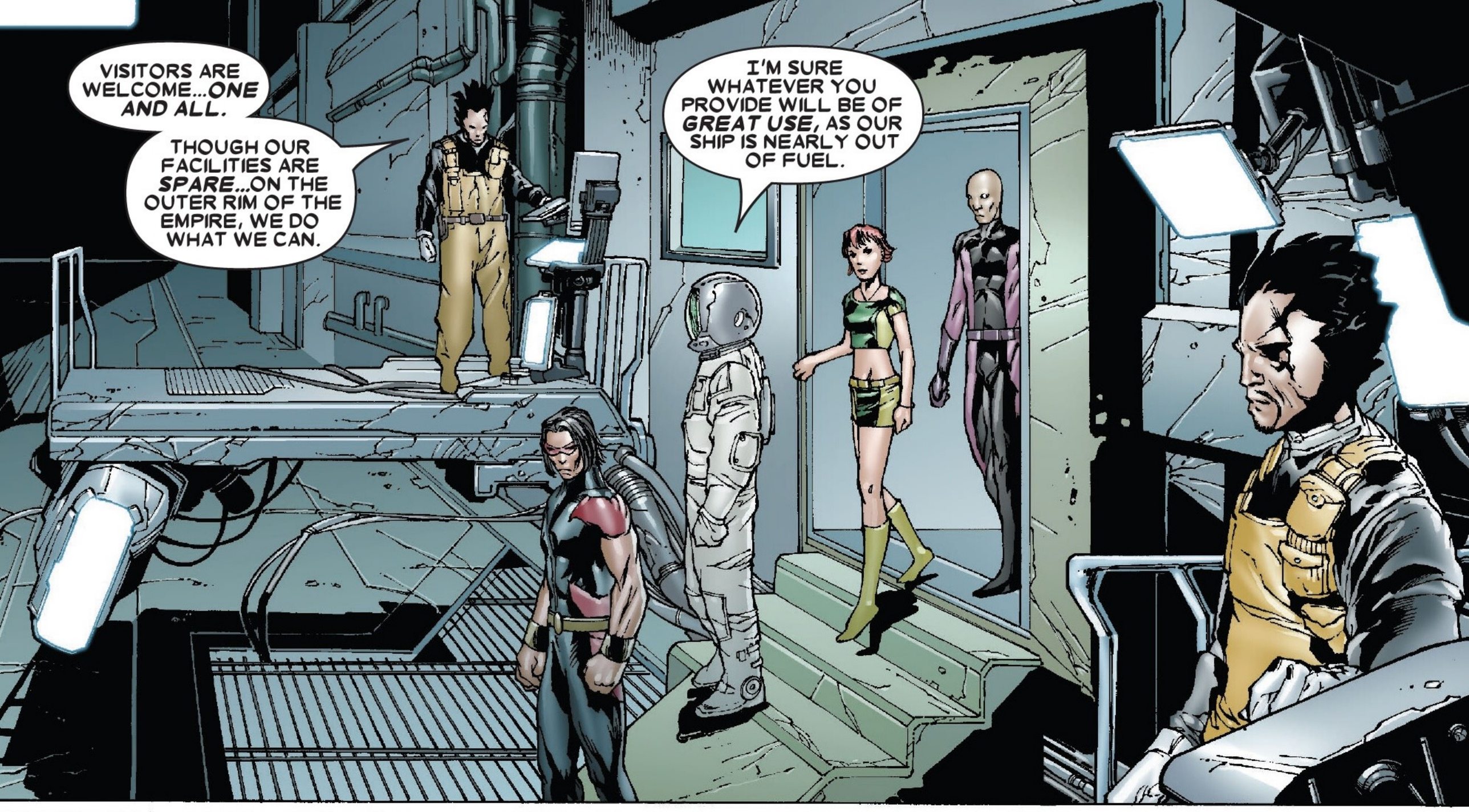

DOES THE EMPRESS *KNOW* OF THE ATTACKS ON THE STARGATES?
SHE KNOWS WHAT MY *SUPERIOR* DECIDES SHE *NEEDS* TO KNOW.
AT PRESENT, HER CONDITION IS FRAGILE. SHE IS BEING TENDED TO.

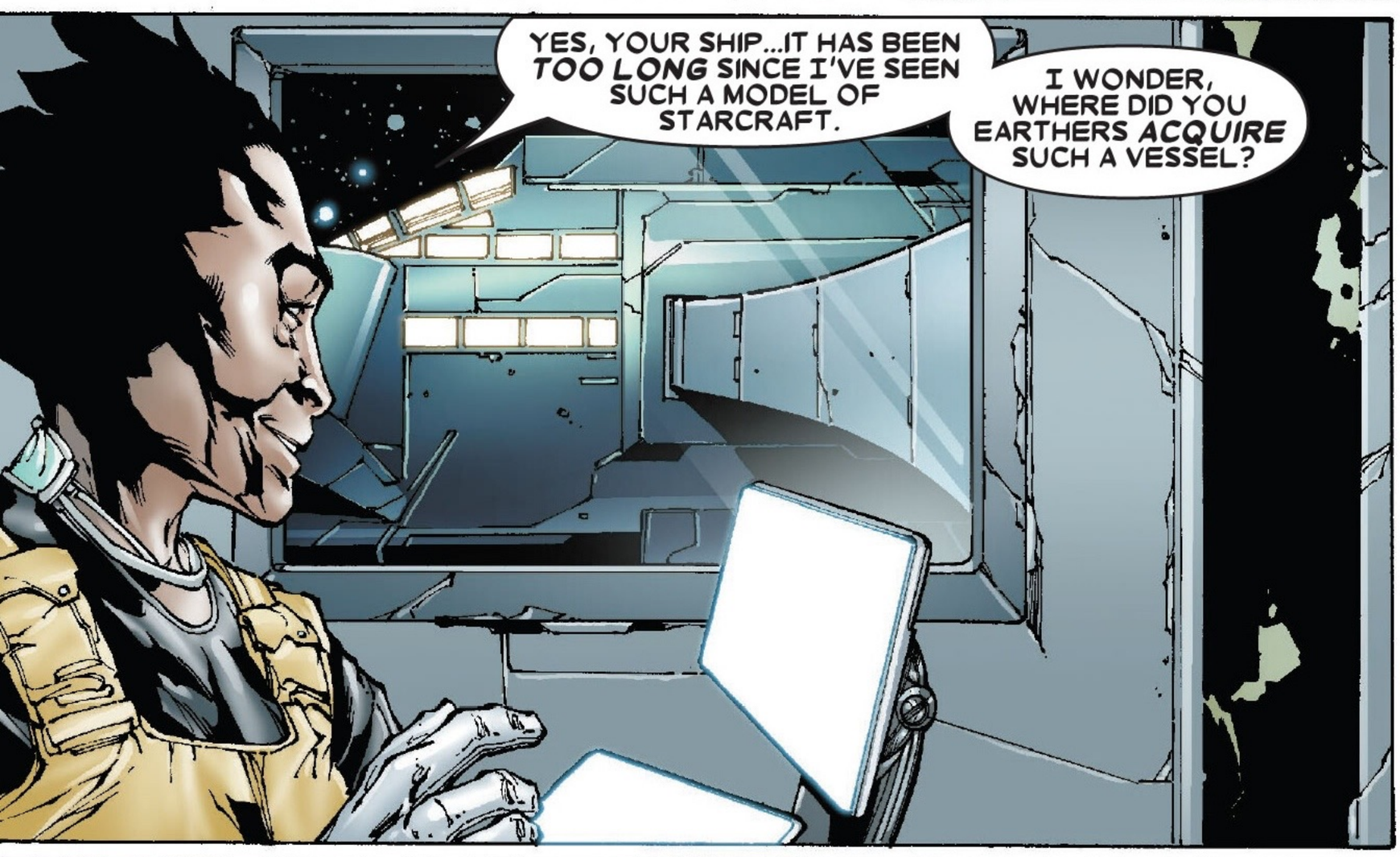
I SEE.
THERE IS ANOTHER MATTER, SIR, THAT I JUST RECEIVED WORD OF...

...ABOUT THE LINE OF THE *PHOENIX*.


WHAT'S IT LOOK LIKE? WE CLEAR?
I THINK SO...JUST A SKELETON CREW HERE. THEIR THOUGHTS ARE *TAME*.
WE *SHOULD* BE ABLE TO "*JEDI*" THEM INTO HELPING US.
VERY WELL THEN, LET'S PROCEED...


THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SHI'AR EMPIRE
CHAPTER FOUR
CASTAWAYS

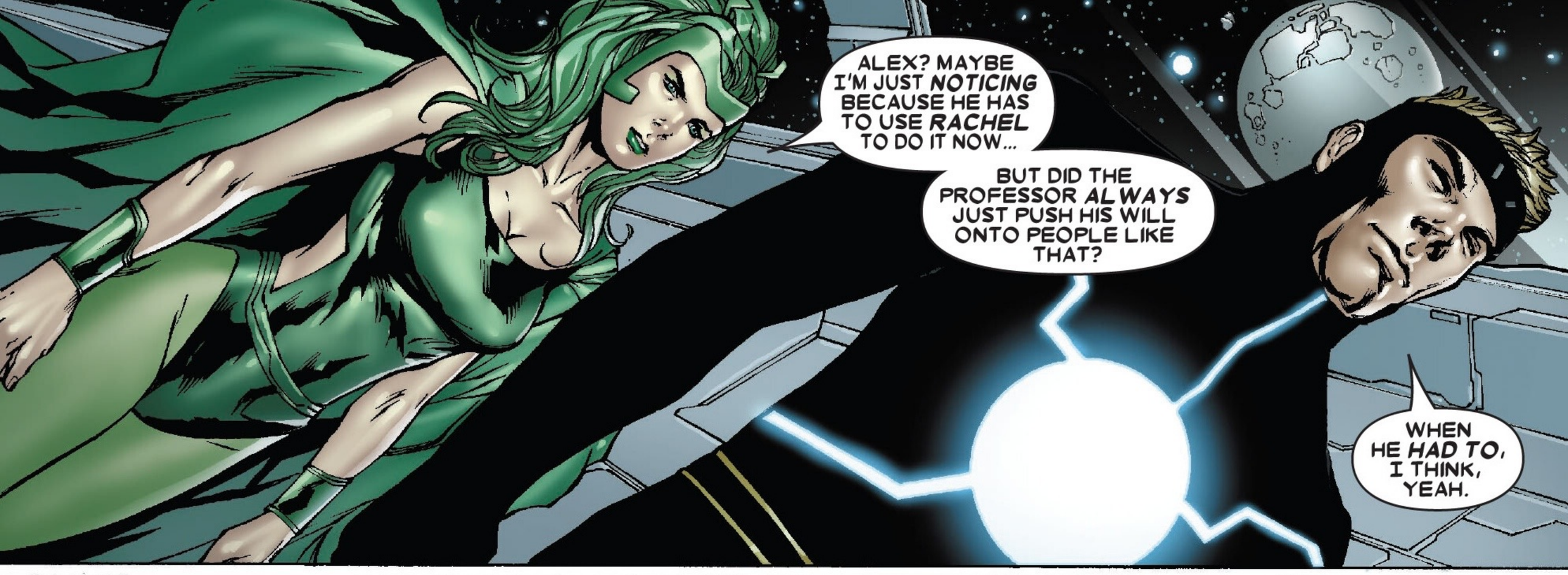

VISITORS ARE WELCOME...ONE AND ALL.
THOUGH OUR FACILITIES ARE SPARE...ON THE OUTER RIM OF THE EMPIRE, WE DO WHAT WE CAN.
I'M SURE WHATEVER YOU PROVIDE WILL BE OF GREAT USE, AS OUR SHIP IS NEARLY OUT OF FUEL.


YES, YOUR SHIP...IT HAS BEEN TOO LONG SINCE I'VE SEEN SUCH A MODEL OF STARCRAFT.
I WONDER, WHERE DID YOU EARTHERS ACQUIRE SUCH A VESSEL?

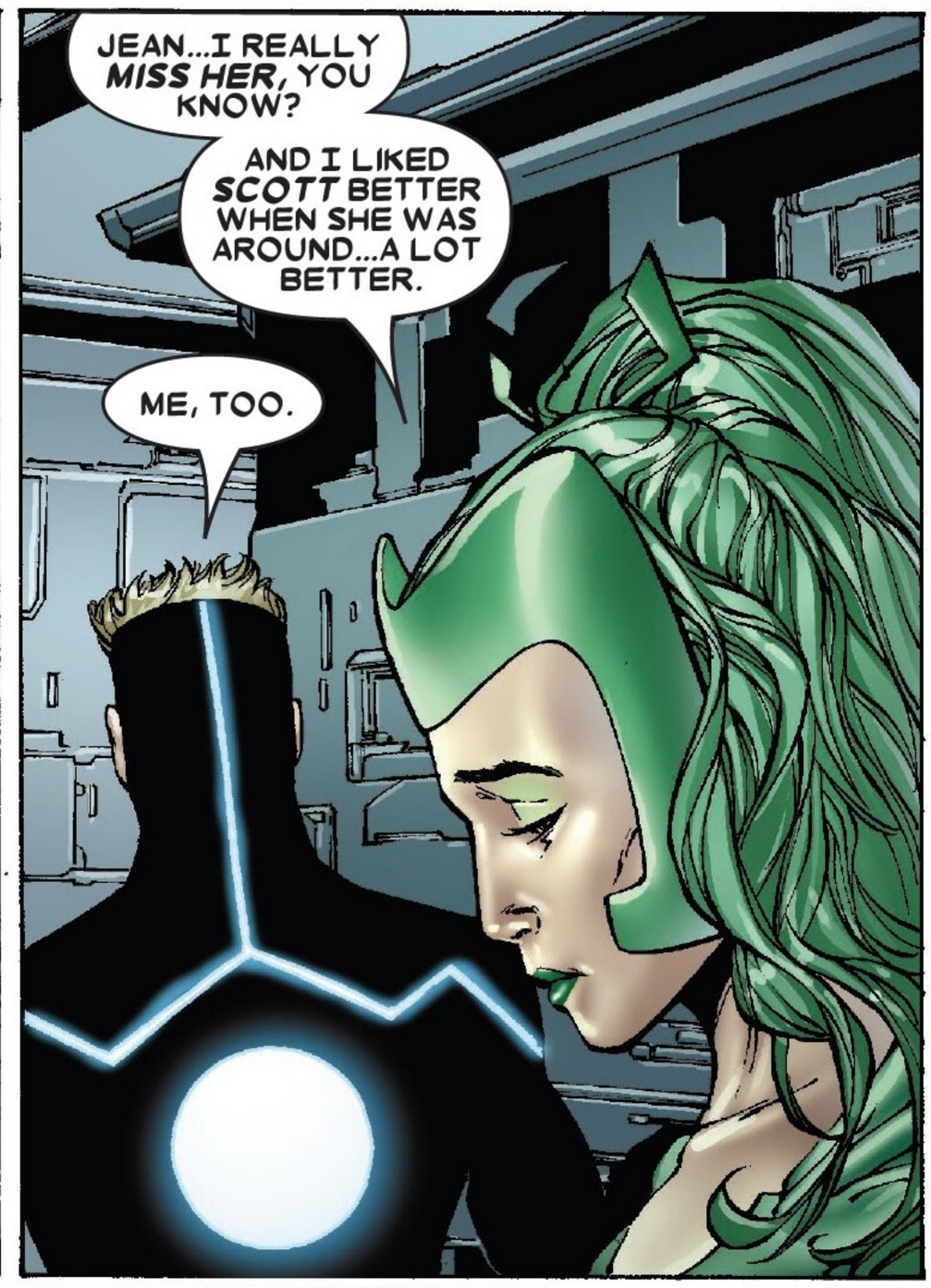
RACHEL?
GOT IT.
YOU DON'T NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE SHIP. JUST REFUEL IT.

YES, I SEE...I WILL BEGIN THE...UH...PROCESS, BUT WE ARE UNDERMANNED, SO IT WILL TAKE TIME.
PERHAPS MY CREW COULD GATHER SUPPLIES WHILE WE WAIT?

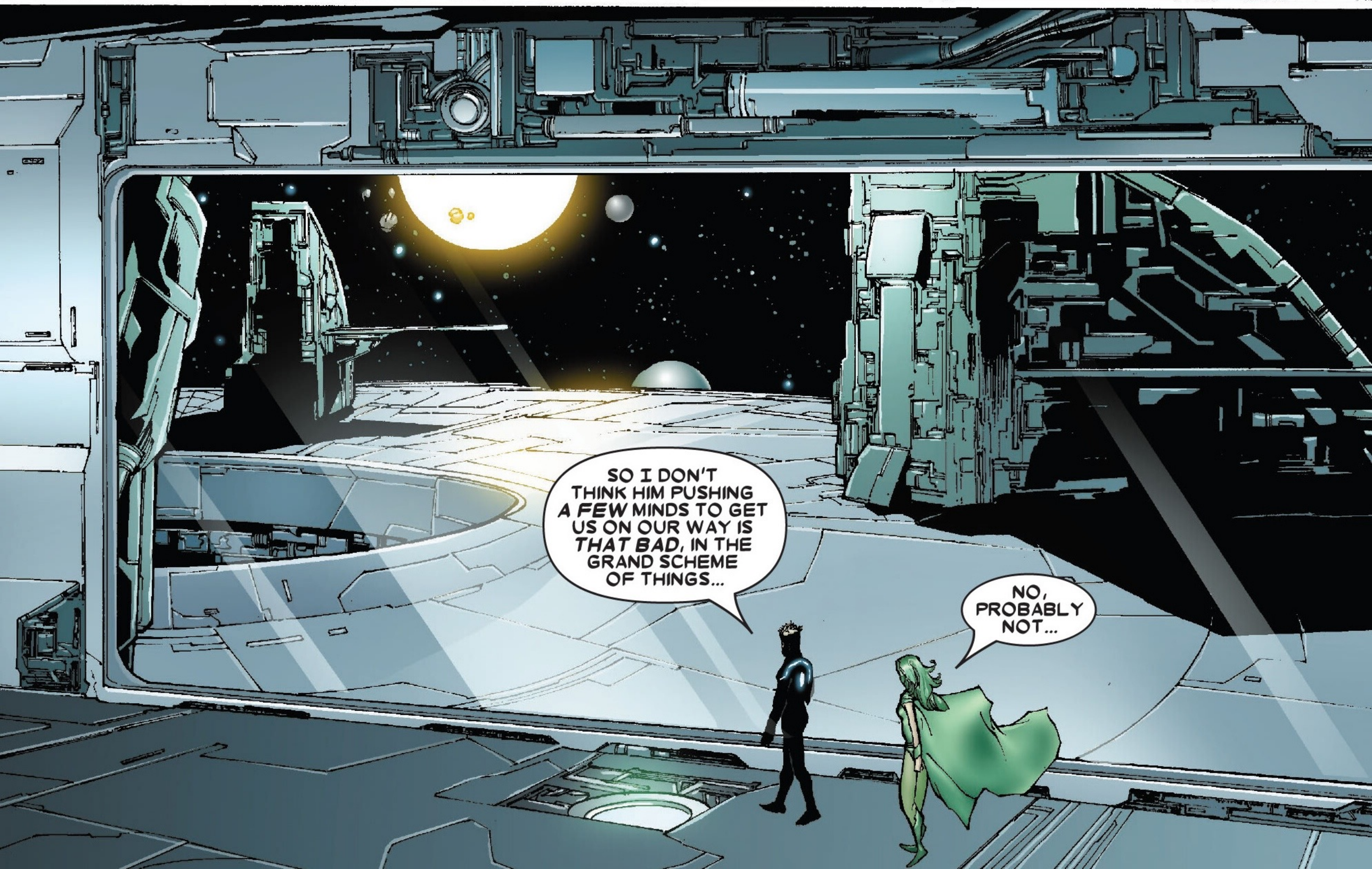
OF...UH, OF COURSE, OUR STATION IS... OPEN...TO YOU...


ALEX? MAYBE I'M JUST *NOTICING* BECAUSE HE HAS TO USE *RACHEL* TO DO IT NOW...
BUT DID THE PROFESSOR *ALWAYS* JUST PUSH HIS WILL ONTO PEOPLE LIKE THAT?
WHEN HE *HAD TO*, I THINK, YEAH.

LIKE, REMEMBER WHEN JEAN BECAME THE *PHOENIX?*
HE MADE THAT WHOLE *AIRPORT* FULL OF PEOPLE FORGET THEY'D SEEN *ANY* OF US.


JEAN...I REALLY *MISS HER*, YOU KNOW?
AND I LIKED *SCOTT* BETTER WHEN SHE WAS AROUND...A LOT BETTER.
ME, TOO.

BUT DON'T FORGET THAT THE SHI'AR ARE THE PEOPLE WHO *KILLED HER* THE FIRST TIME...
AND THEY'D DO THE SAME TO PROFESSOR X IF THEY GOT THE CHANCE...


SO I DON'T THINK HIM PUSHING *A FEW* MINDS TO GET US ON OUR WAY IS *THAT BAD*, IN THE GRAND SCHEME OF THINGS...
NO, PROBABLY NOT...

DOES SOMETHING TROUBLE YOU, *MEIN FREUND?*
A *FEW* THINGS, ACTUALLY, NIGHTCRAWLER. I DON'T LIKE HOW THE PROFESSOR'S TREATING ME, FOR STARTERS.
WE'VE BEEN IN SPACE ALMOST A *WEEK*, AND HE'S HARDLY LET ME OUT OF HIS SIGHT...
HE *IS* BEING OVERPROTECTIVE, DARWIN...I AGREE.
BUT YOU ARE STILL *NEW* TO HIM.
I *GUESS*, BUT IT CAN'T GO ON LIKE THIS...I'M AMAZED HE EVEN LET ME DO *THIS* WITH YOU.
AND WHY'S HE WEARING THAT *SUIT?* WHAT'S GOING ON?
PROFESSOR X IS A *WANTED* MAN IN SHI'AR SPACE.
WHAT? *WHY?*
IT IS A LONG STORY, INVOLVING AN EVIL TWIN...
...I WOULD RATHER *NOT* GO INTO IT.

WHAT DO YOU SAY, ALEX?

WELL, I DON'T HAVE MY *SHI'AR TO ENGLISH* DICTIONARY...

...BUT I *THINK* IT'S A SAFE BET THIS WAS WHERE THE *SECURITY GEAR* WAS STORED...

...WHEN THEY *HAD* A SECURITY DETAIL.

BEFORE THIS PLACE BECAME THE *GHOST STATION* AT THE EDGE OF THE UNIVERSE.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT DISGUISES ARE GOING TO *DO* FOR US, WE'RE CLEARLY *NOT* SHI'AR...

THE SHI'AR EMPIRE HAS ABSORBED *A LOT* OF CULTURES OVER THE MILLENNIA...

...SO IT'S NOT *OUT OF THE QUESTION* THAT--

--OH *GOD.*

I THINK IT IS IN THE OTHER DIRECTION...

NO, IT'S THIS ONE...*THAT* SIGN SAYS *FOOD STORAGE.*

YOU CAN *READ* SHI'AR?

SURE. I LOOKED THROUGH SOME OF THE SHIP'S LOGS UNTIL IT MADE SENSE.

AND NOW THAT I HEARD THOSE *WORKMEN* WITH THE PROFESSOR, I CAN SPEAK IT PRETTY WELL, TOO.

[illegible]

AMAZING. WHAT DID YOU SAY?

LOOK OUT!

WHAT--?

SHRKOW
BAMF
BBRRTT-BRRTT-ENVIRONMENT BREACHED-BRRTT-BRRTT-EMERGENCY SYSTEM ACTIVATED
DARWIN!
NOOO!
BRRTT-BRRTT-EMERGENCY SYSTEM-BLAST DOORS ACTIVATED!

OKAY...I'M FLOATING IN *SPACE*...AND SUDDENLY I DON'T NEED TO BREATHE AND MY SKIN AND INTERNAL STRUCTURE ARE INCREASING IN DENSITY.

GOOD.

GOTTA WARN THE *PROFESSOR*... THIS PLACE ISN'T WHAT IT SEEMS.

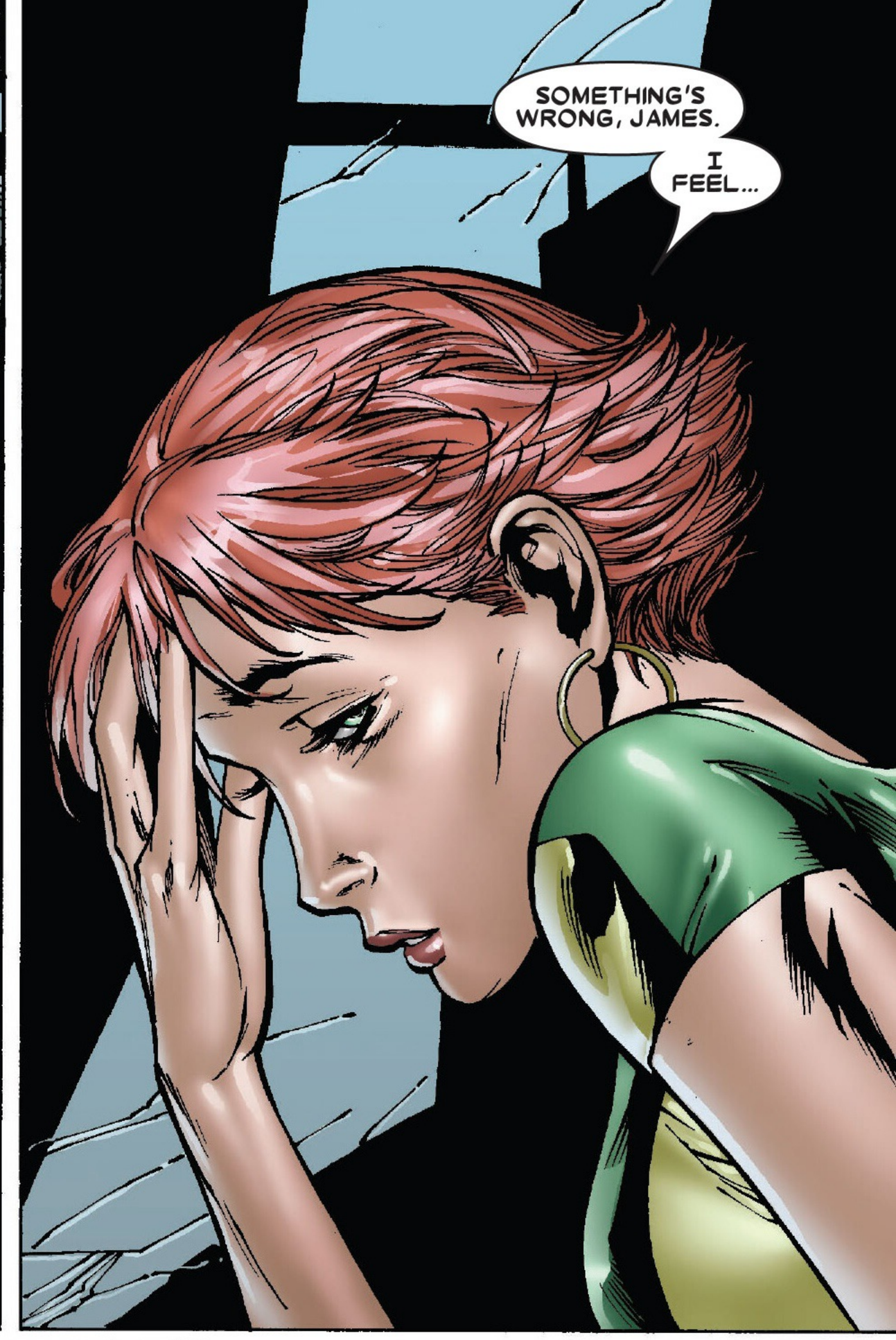
WHATEVER THAT THING WAS, IT *WASN'T* SHI'AR...

...AND I'M GUESSING, NEITHER ARE THE MEN *HE'S* DEALING WITH...

WHAT'S WRONG, RAY?

DON'T *KNOW*... SUDDENLY I JUST GOT THIS NAUSEATING HEADACHE...

I WAS TRYING TO *MIND-PROBE* THAT LEAD WORKER... THE WAY HE KEEPS LOOKING AT OUR SHIP, I THOUGHT...
AND THEN, JUST... *OW.*


SOMETHING'S WRONG, JAMES.
I FEEL...

SOMETHING'S-- WRONG?
WHAT THE HELL?

DIE, EARTHMEN.
AW, HELL...
PROFESSOR! IT'S A TRAP!

WHAT *ARE* YOU? I LIKE TO *KNOW* WHAT IT IS I'M KILLING.

YOU WILL KILL NO ONE *ELSE* TODAY, MONSTER.

IF *I* HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT.

--HUUUUHH!

BAMF

SO YOU *CAN* SURVIVE OUT THERE, SKRULL...

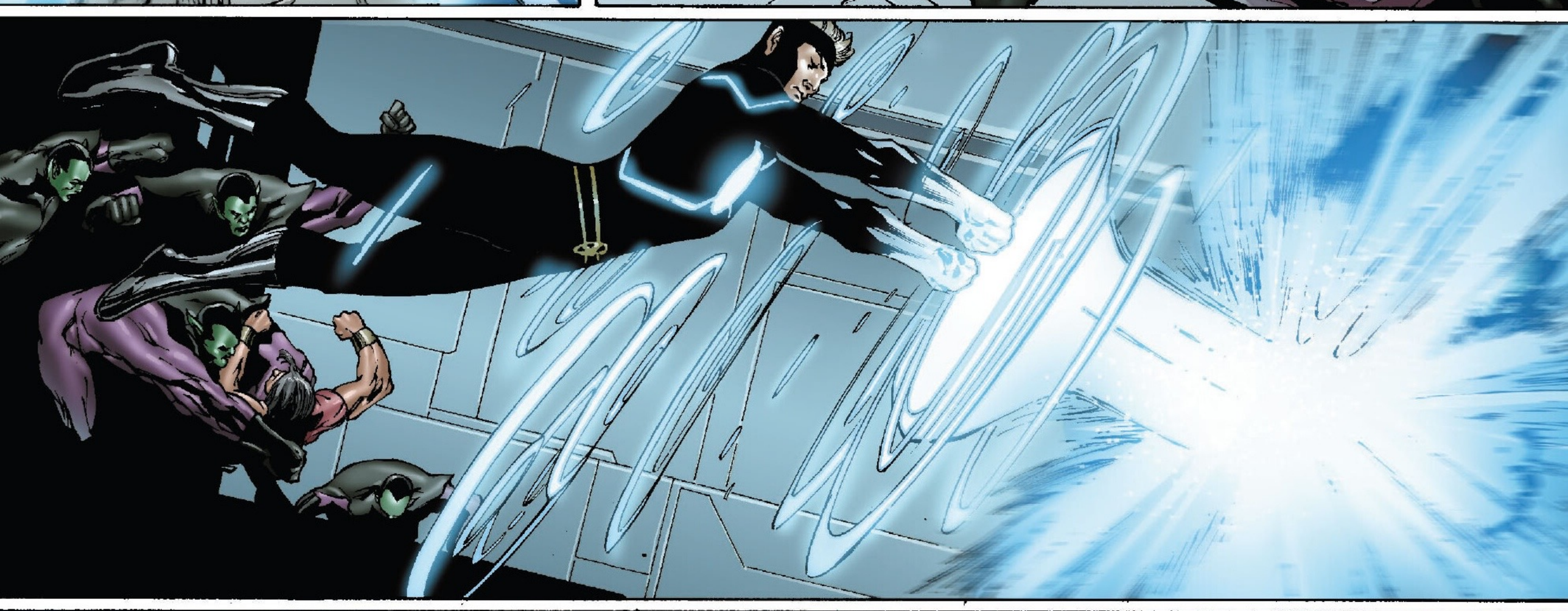
LET US HOPE I MAY SAY THE SAME FOR MY FRIEND.

...CAN'T THINK... MOVE...
THEY'RE WAR SKRULLS, RAY... SOUPED-UP SKRULL SOLDIERS.
ONE OF 'EM MUST HAVE AN IMPLANT THAT'S GIVING YOU MENTAL FEEDBACK... MAKING YOU SICK.
BUT REMEMBER, YOU'RE NOT JUST A TELEPATH.
LISTEN TO WARPATH, RACHEL.
EARTHMAN... YOU THINK YOUR WORDS MATTER?
THEY DO NOT.
UKK--!

PROFESSOR!

UNH!

I WAS HOPING FOR A FIGHT...
...NOT THIS SIMPLE WEAKLING.
THEN COME ON, MURDERER! COME ON!



AH...THANK YOU FOR CHARGING MY FORCE-FIELD...

LORNA, THERE'S AN IMPLANT IN ONE OF THE SKRULLS' BRAINS...IT'S *HURTING* RACHEL.

YOU WANT ME TO DO *BRAIN SURGERY?*

YOU HAVE NO *CHOICE*. REACH OUT, FIND IT... DESTROY IT.

OKAY, BUT REMEMBER, *YOU* ASKED...

HEY, I *HAD* MOST OF THEM...

WELL, THAT ONE IS STILL *CONSCIOUS*. KICK HIM.

GOOD POINT.

KKRK

RACHEL? ARE YOU--
I'M FINE...
...JUST MAD.
YOU PEOPLE MESSED WITH MY *HEAD*.
YOU *DON'T* DO THAT.
KKSSHH
HEY--!
RACHEL, WHAT DID YOU--
TELEKINESIS ON A MOLECULAR LEVEL. IT *LOOKS* MORE IMPRESSIVE THAN IT *IS*.
BUT DON'T WORRY...I *DIDN'T* KILL HIM.
NOT THAT HE'D HAVE SPARED ANY OF *US*.

DARWIN...?

YEAH, SORRY TO SCARE YOU...IT TOOK AWHILE TO FIND A WAY BACK IN...
YOU TRULY ARE A WONDER. I SURVIVED A FEW SECONDS OUT THERE IN THE VACUUM OF SPACE, BUT YOU...
IT'S NO BIG DEAL.
CAN YOU TELEPORT THROUGH THIS DOOR?
AS LONG AS I KNOW WHAT'S INSIDE... BUT WHY?

I SAW A FEW SHI'AR LOCKED IN THERE WHEN I WAS OUTSIDE...I THOUGHT MAYBE THEY COULD TELL US WHAT'S GOING ON.
IS THE SPACE JUST BEYOND THE DOOR CLEAR?
YES.

THEN I'LL BE RIGHT BACK.
BAMF

--AND THEN A MAN LIKE A *SHOOTING STAR* FLEW RIGHT THROUGH THE SHIP LIKE WE WERE *NOTHING*. MOST OF OUR CREWMATES DIED...

WE WERE IN THE *SHUTTLE*. WE GOT LUCKY.

AND THE WAR SKRULLS?

WE FOUND THEM FLOATING IN SPACE, IN THE GUISE OF OUR PEOPLE. SO WE *RESCUED* THEM.

THEN IT WAS *TOO LATE*.

THEY TOLD OF BEING *REFUGEES* FROM THEIR SYSTEM...OF A *FORCE* MOVING THROUGH SPACE, DESTROYING *ALL*.

THEY WANTED A *REAL* SHIP, SO THEY KILLED THE WORKERS AT THE STATION AND TOOK THEIR PLACES TO WAIT.

SO, WHY DID THEY SPARE *YOU TWO*?

RACHEL.

IT IS A GOOD QUESTION. DO YOU HAVE AN ANSWER FOR IT?

THEY SAID THEIR CODE WOULD NOT ALLOW THEM TO KILL ANY WHO SAVED THEM.
IT'S THE FIRST I'VE HEARD OF SKRULLS HAVING ANY CODE.

THE SKRULL AREN'T WITHOUT HONOR. HOWEVER TWISTED IT MAY BE.

VERY WELL... YOU MAY RIDE WITH US UNTIL THE NEAREST SHI'AR HUB...
YOU HAVE OUR THANKS, EARTHER.
YOU'LL FIND EXTRA BUNKS BELOW DECK.

CHARLES... THIS IS NOT A GOOD IDEA.
SHOULD WE HAVE JUST LEFT THEM?
SUPPOSE THE SKRULLS BREAK FREE BEFORE OUR SIGNAL REACHED THE AUTHORITIES?
IT WILL BE FINE, KURT.

YOU SAW?
YES...IT'S THE IMPERIAL CONSORT. WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

FOR NOW... NOTHING. BUT WHEN THE TIME COMES...
...WE WILL DELIVER HIM TO THE VICE-CHANCELLOR'S JUSTICE.

THE THIRD MOON OF PHYGIM--HIGH SECURITY PRISON
...WHAT... WHAT DO YOU WANT...?
YOU KNOW WHO I AM?
YOU'RE THE MAN WHO PUT ME HERE...
I'M MUCH MORE THAN THAT.
I'M ALSO THE MAN WHO HAD YOUR BROTHERS KILLED AND YOUR MOTHER STERILIZED.

JUST AS MY PREDECESSORS HAVE DONE WITH THE DESCENDANTS OF ROOK'SHIR FOR FIVE HUNDRED YEARS...
WHEREVER WE CAN FIND YOU.
BUT YOU ARE THE LAST, KORVUS.
AND DO YOU KNOW WHY I LET YOU LIVE?
NO.
BECAUSE I KNEW THERE WOULD BE A DAY WHEN I'D HAVE NEED OF YOU.
THAT DAY HAS COME.
HOW WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR SENTENCE COMMUTED? TO ROAM FREELY ABOUT THE STARS?
WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO?
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
SOMETHING THAT ONLY THE BLADE OF THE PHOENIX CAN DO...

UNCANNY X-MEN 479

SO IT'S TRUE...
...THE SWORD IS REAL.
THE SWORD OF MY ANCESTOR, KILLED OVER 400 CYCLES PAST.
YOU MAY TAKE IT DOWN, KORVUS...I KNOW YOU WILL NOT HARM *ME* WITH IT.
THE IMPLANT IN YOUR BRAIN WILL *KILL YOU* IF YOU RAISE A HAND TO *ANY* SHI'AR.
THIS DAY SHOULD *NEVER* HAVE COME TO PASS.
ROOK'SHIR'S *OWN* BLADE... IN MY HANDS.

ROOK'SHIR, THE EMPIRE'S DIRTY SECRET...THE SHI'AR WHO BECAME THE PHOENIX.
AN INTERGALACTIC OUTLAW WITH THE POWER OF THE UNIVERSE IN HIS GRASP.

THE SHI'AR FORMED THE FIRST IMPERIAL GUARD TO STOP HIM FROM DESTROYING THE EMPIRE.

BUT AN INFINITESIMAL PIECE OF THE PHOENIX FORCE SOMEHOW REMAINED WITHIN HIS SWORD.
A SWORD ONLY ABLE TO BE CARRIED BY HIS BLOOD HEIRS...
...AND I AM THE LAST OF THOSE.

I AM THE ONLY ONE LEFT WHO CAN WIELD THE BLADE OF THE PHOENIX.
AND I DO NOT DESERVE THE HONOR.
YES...FEEL ITS FIRE...ITS POWER...
THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SH'AR EMPIRE
CHAPTER FIVE
DOUBLE-EDGED
BUT WHAT CHOICE DO I HAVE?
...AND REMEMBER THAT IT WILL BUY YOUR FREEDOM...
...AFTER ALL THESE CYCLES.
THE DEAL HAS BEEN STRUCK, VICE-CHANCELLOR... THERE'S NO NEED TO REMIND ME OF IT.
WHAT CHOICE?

WEEKS LATER...

SPACE TRAVEL IS BORING.

YOU ARE *JOKING*, I HOPE, JAMES?

NO. I MEAN IT.

IT'S BEEN *WEEKS* SINCE WE'VE SEEN ANYTHING BUT ASTEROID BELTS AND SUPERNOVAS.

IF I WASN'T HELPING TRAIN THE *NEW KID*, I'D'VE THROWN MYSELF OUT AN *AIRLOCK* BY NOW.

BUT CAN YOU NOT SEE THE *MAJESTY* OF WHAT IS AROUND US?

EVEN THE *BLACK* IS DEEPER HERE...

I COULD WATCH THE STARS PASS US BY FOR *MONTHS* WITHOUT LOSING INTEREST.
YOU MIGHT *GET* THAT CHANCE, KURT...

THOSE OUTER-RIM *STARGATES* OUR RESIDENT *SHI'AR* STEERED US TO HAVE HELPED OUR PROGRESS...
...BUT WE'RE STILL A *LONG WAY* FROM THE HEART OF SHI'AR SPACE.

MEANWHILE, I'M GOING STIR-CRAZY AND MY SENSES ARE *ALL OVER* THE PLACE...
...I CAN'T EVEN REMEMBER WHAT *GRASS* SMELLS LIKE.

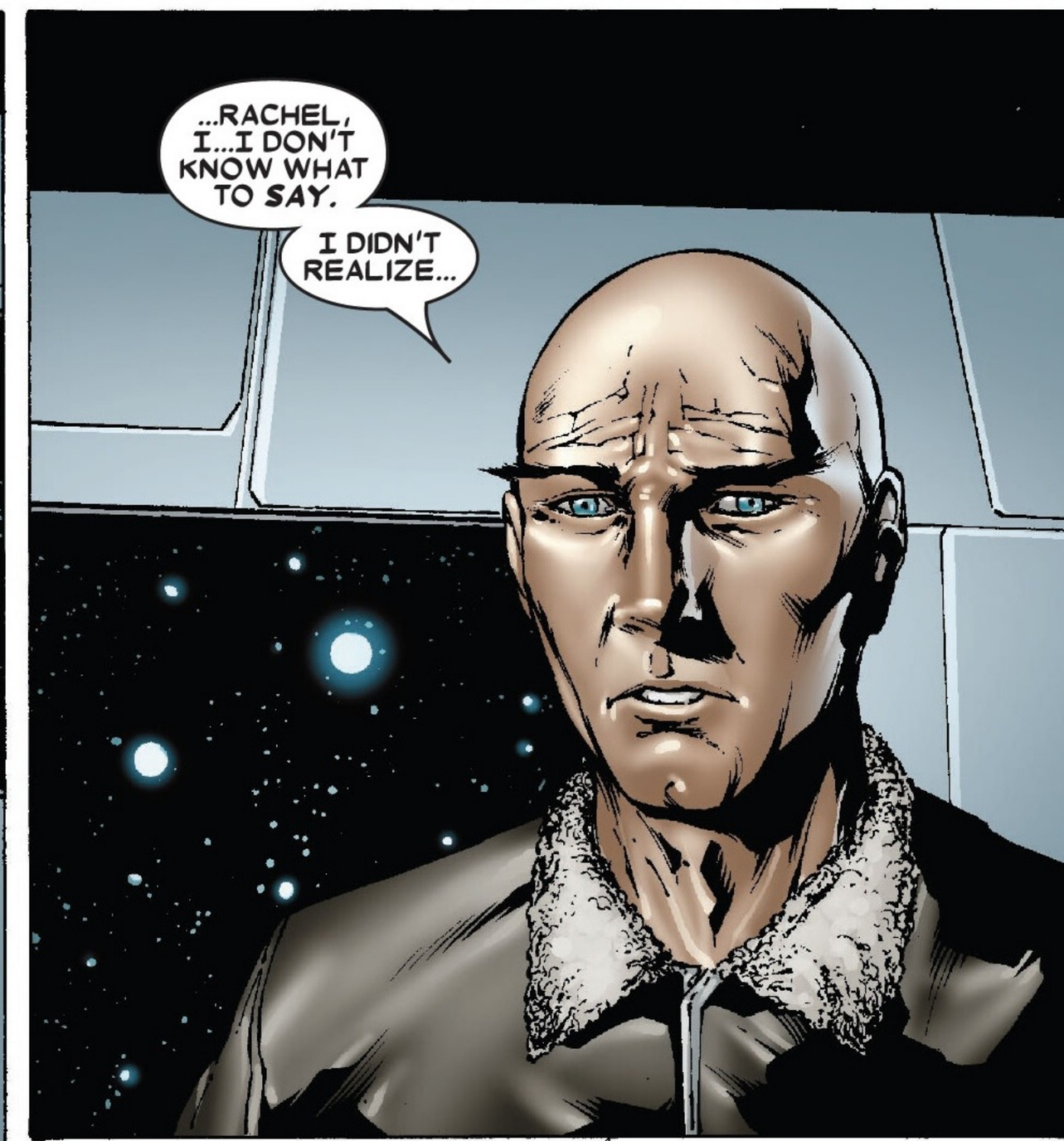
YES...THERE ARE PARTS OF WHO WE *ARE* THAT WE ONLY *NOTICE* WHEN THINGS ARE DIFFERENT.
I NEED TO PUT MY FEET ON SOME *DIRT*, NIGHTCRAWLER... FEEL THE WIND.

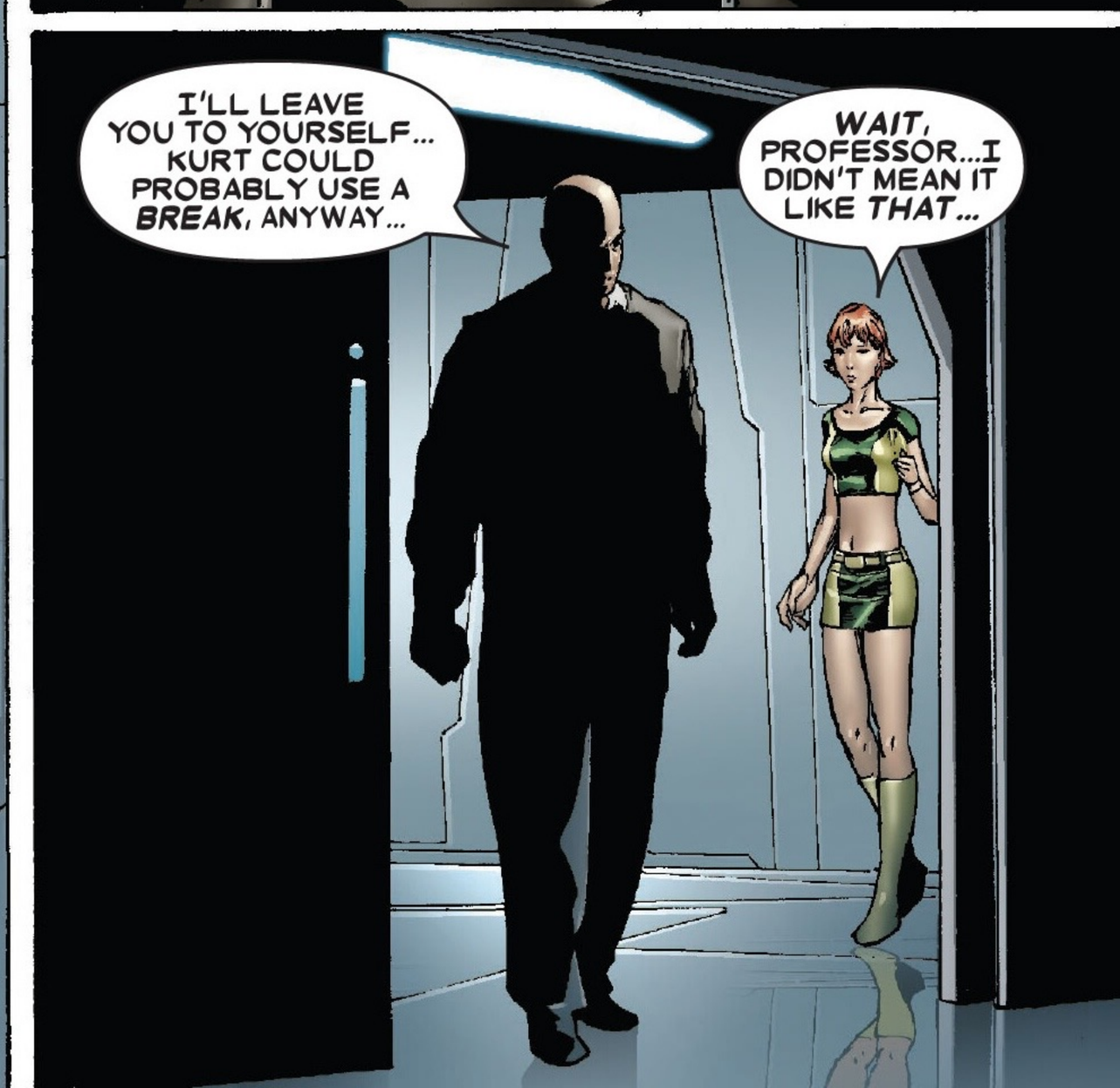
PERHAPS RACHEL COULD *TELEPATHICALLY*--
THAT MAY WORK FOR SCOTT AND EMMA, BUT IT'S *NOT* THE SAME... NOT FOR ME.
ANYWAY, RAY'S BEEN SO BUSY WITH THE PROFESSOR, I DOUBT SHE'D HAVE *TIME*...

STOP IT.
RACHEL, I'M JUST TRYING TO HELP YOU INCREASE THE SUBTLETY OF YOUR PROCESS.
I KNOW... AND I SAID STOP.

WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S WRONG?
I THOUGHT WE WERE WORKING TOGETHER ON THIS...

NO, YOU'RE WORKING ON ME. AND IT'S TOO MUCH SOMETIMES.
IT'S LIKE YOU'RE ALWAYS AT ME...TRYING TO GET ME TO LINK UP...

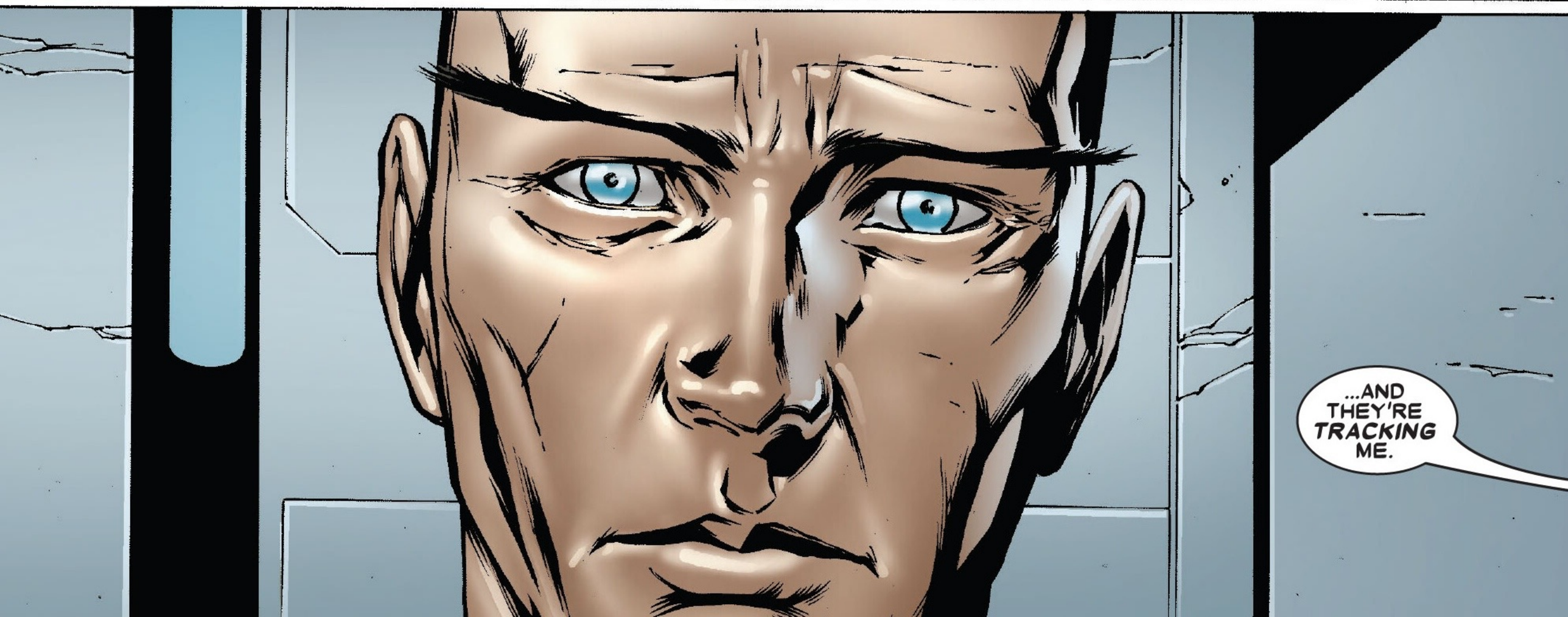

...RACHEL, I...I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.
I DIDN'T REALIZE...

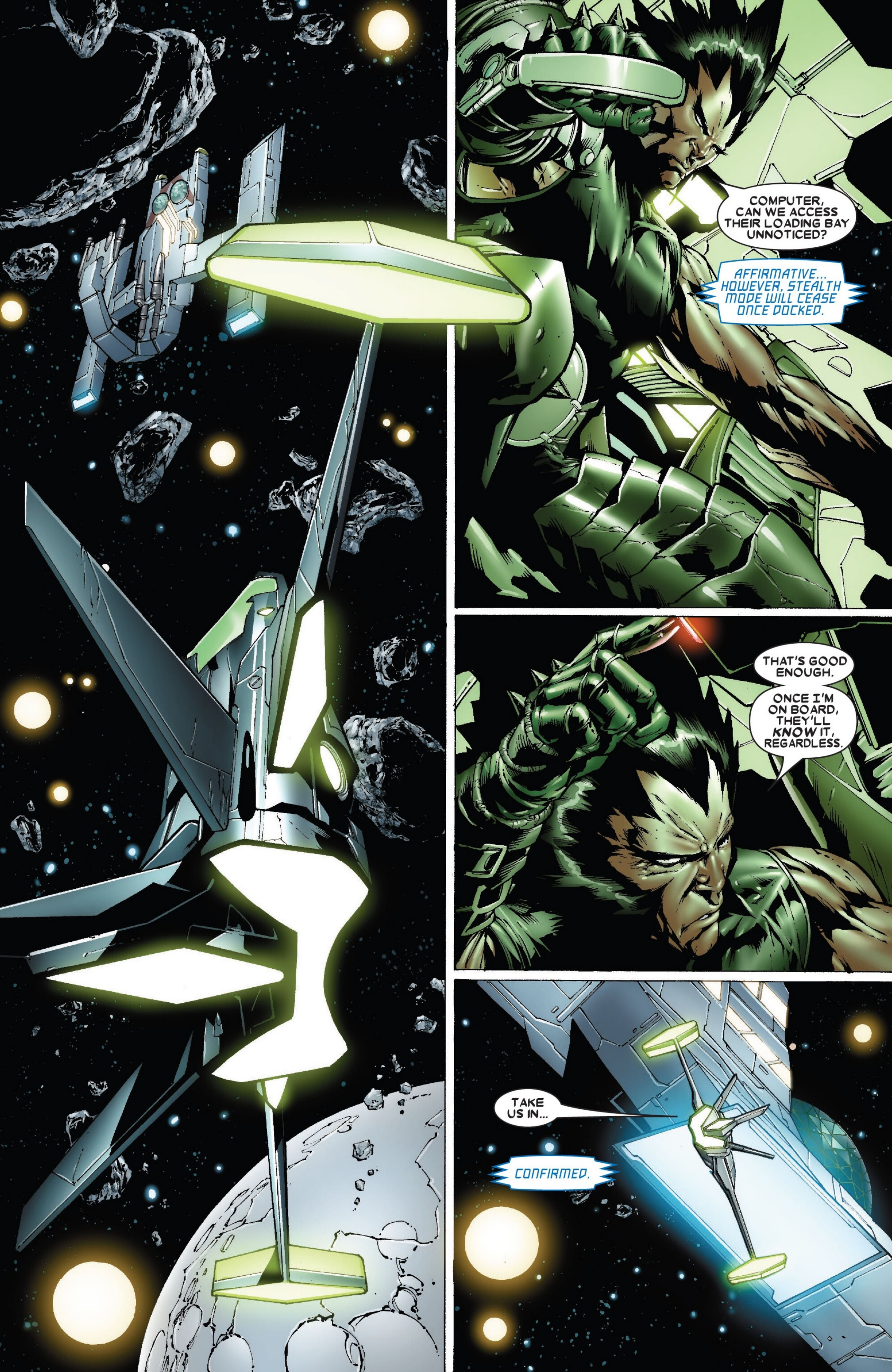

I'LL LEAVE YOU TO YOURSELF... KURT COULD PROBABLY USE A BREAK, ANYWAY...
WAIT, PROFESSOR...I DIDN'T MEAN IT LIKE THAT...

I'M JUST BEING *GRUMPY*... IT'S NOT YOU, IT'S OUR *SHI'AR* PASSENGERS.
I'M PRETTY SURE THEY KNOW WHO YOU ARE, BUT THEY'RE KEEPING THEIR MINDS *PURPOSELY BLANK*...LIKE THEY'VE HAD *TRAINING*.
IT'S LIKELY THEY *HAVE*.

AND THEN THERE'S THE THING THAT *DEATHSQUAD* PUT ON MY BACK-- THE *PHOENIX BRAND*.
WHAT *ABOUT* IT?
FOR THE LAST TWO DAYS, IT'S LIKE I CAN FEEL IT GETTING *HOT* BENEATH MY SKIN...

THEY *KNOW* I'M IN THEIR TERRITORY, PROFESSOR... THE SHI'AR MINISTRY DO...

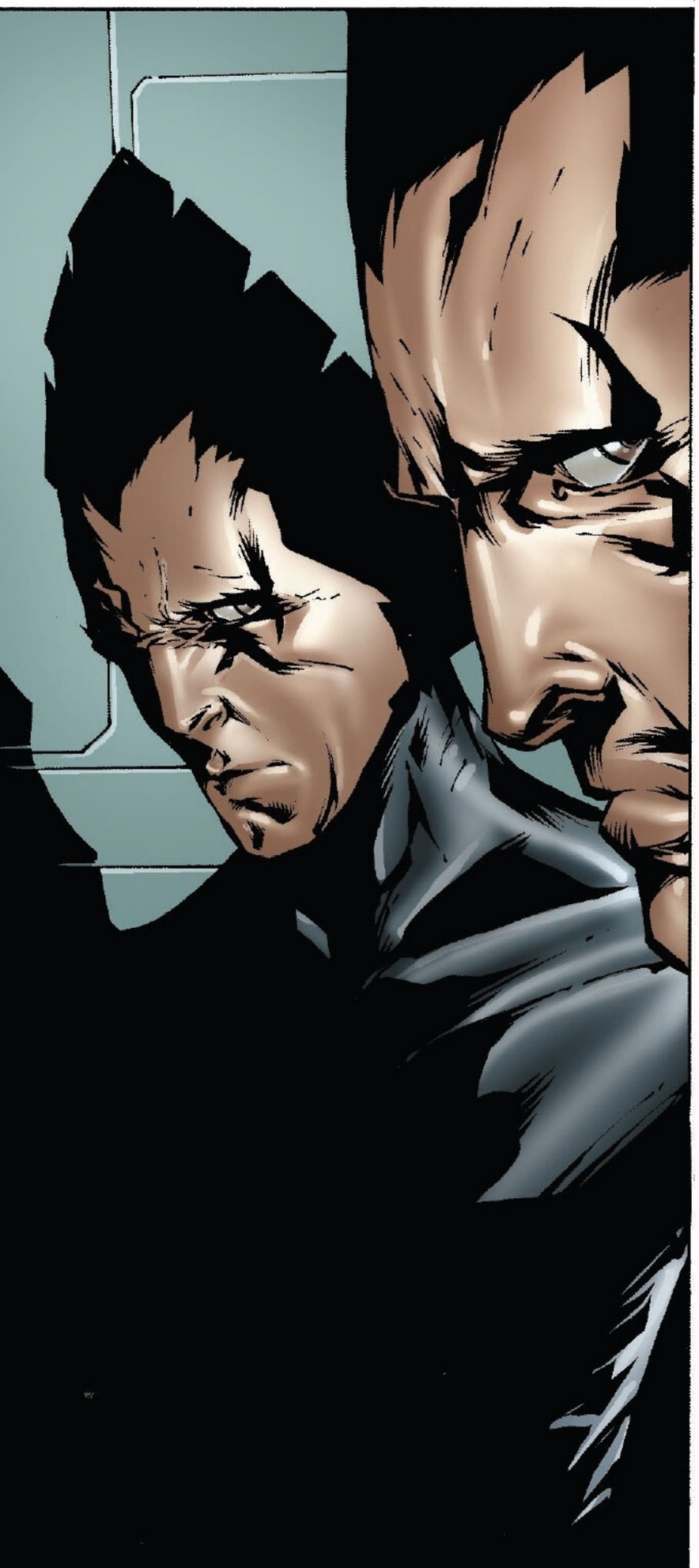

...AND THEY'RE *TRACKING* ME.


COMPUTER, CAN WE ACCESS THEIR LOADING BAY UNNOTICED?
AFFIRMATIVE... HOWEVER, STEALTH MODE WILL CEASE ONCE DOCKED.
THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH.
ONCE I'M ON BOARD, THEY'LL KNOW IT, REGARDLESS.
TAKE US IN...
CONFIRMED.

--YOU DON'T WANT TO SPAR, THAT'S FINE, BUT DON'T MOPE AROUND.
I JUST... I WISH I WAS HERE BECAUSE OF WHAT I CAN DO.
NOT BECAUSE I SHARED A MIND WITH VULCAN FOR A FEW DAYS.

THAT WAS THE WORST EXPERIENCE OF MY LIFE, YOU KNOW?
I COULDN'T DO ANYTHING BUT WATCH WHILE ONE OF MY ONLY FRIENDS WENT INSANE.
YEAH... THAT SUCKS.

OH, GOOD DAY, EARTHERS...
WHERE'RE YOU TWO HEADED?
WE SEEK SUSTENANCE. FOOD SUPPLIES.



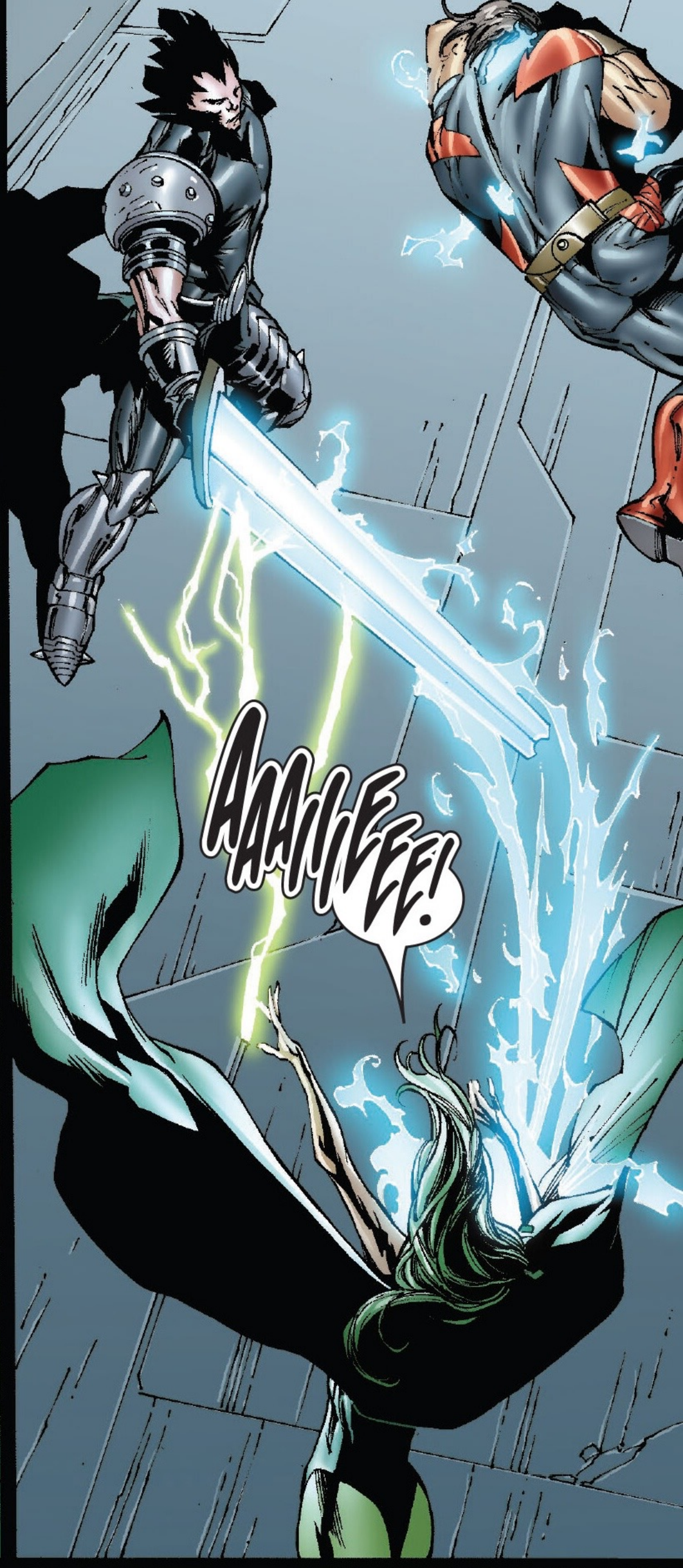
THOSE TWO ARE UP TO SOMETHING.
I KNOW... BUT WHAT?
IT'S NOT LIKE THEY COULD TAKE YOU GUYS ON.

SECURITY BREACH-- DOCKING BAY-- SECURITY BREACH-- DOCKING BAY
WHAT?
DAMN IT. THIS CAN'T BE GOOD.
GO-- FOLLOW THOSE DAMN SHI'AR! BUT STAY OUT OF SIGHT.
RIGHT... WHAT ABOUT YOU?
LOOKS LIKE I'VE GOT SOME PARTY-CRASHERS TO BOUNCE.

JAMES-- WE'VE GOT AN INTRUDER!
I KNOW.
WHAT'S GOING ON?
IT'S THOSE SHI'AR, ISN'T IT? DID THEY SABOTAGE US?
THEY BETTER NOT HAVE.
WHO THE...?
WOW. THAT IS A REALLY BIG SWORD.
STOP. I MEAN NO HARM TO ANY BUT THE GIRL WHO WAS TOUCHED BY THE PHOENIX.
BUT I'LL DO WHAT I HAVE TO TO GET TO HER.

THEN DO WHAT YOU HAVE TO, FEATHERHEAD.
DAMN THE STARS...
AHHHH!
WARPATH!
LISTEN TO ME--YOU CAN'T BEAT THIS BLADE.

HOW ABOUT IF I *TAKE IT* FROM YOU, THEN?


AAAIIEE!

KURT?
PLAN 9?
LET'S DO IT.

BAMF

UHN!
WAAKKK
KKUU--
I DIDN'T WANT THIS... I TOLD YOU...
...I DIDN'T WANT ANY OF THIS...

NIGHTCRAWLER, REPORT! WHAT'S HAPPENING DOWN THERE?
KURT-- COME IN!
YOU TWO--GET DOWN TO THE LOADING BAY AND FIND OUT WHAT'S--
NO. WE WILL NOT BE DOING THAT...
...CHARLES XAVIER, TRAITOR TO THE IMPERIUM.
DAMN... HURT...WHAT WAS THAT...?
I'M AFRAID THAT WAS ME, RACHEL GREY...

MY BLADE AND YOU, THEY'RE *LINKED*...
SO, YOU'RE *IT*? THEY ONLY SENT *ONE OF YOU* THIS TIME?
THEY UNDERESTIMATED ME...
...AGAIN.
UNNNH!
WHAT... WAS *THAT*?
TELEKINESIS... I DON'T HAVE TO TOUCH YOU TO *HURT YOU*.
I DON'T HAVE TO GET ANYWHERE *NEAR* THAT BIG HONKIN' SWORD.

HOW I WISH IT WERE THAT SIMPLE...

AAAIIEEEE!

...UNH...UH... UUH...

I'M SORRY FOR THIS...

NO!

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE? I FEEL YOUR THOUGHTS STUCK OVER MINE...
WE'RE TOUCHING MINDS...I DIDN'T DO IT...YOUR SWORD DID...
THE SWORD HOLDS BUT THE SMALLEST PIECE OF THE PHOENIX FORCE.
AND YOU BROUGHT IT NEAR ME? DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT THEY'VE DONE TO ME BECAUSE OF THE PHOENIX?
MY FAMILY HAS BEEN SLAIN, WHOLE GENERATIONS... MY BROTHER'S LAUGHTER WILL NEVER SOUND AGAIN...MY--
--GRANDMOTHER, TURNED TO ASHES BEFORE MY EYES. EVERY ONE OF MY FAMILY LINE--
--KILLED. TO NEVER HAVE THE CHANCE--
DO YOU SEE ME NOW? DO YOU SEE WHO I'VE BEEN?
I'VE WORKED FOR MY ENEMIES, TOO...SEEN MY PEOPLE VAPORIZED BY SENTINELS...KILLED MY OWN KIND...
DO YOU SEE ME? DO YOU--

NOOOO!
THE BLADE... IT'S WRONG... WEAKENED.
YOU TOOK SOME.
NO...IT TOOK TO ME...
...THE PHOENIX KNOWS ME, REMEMBER? IT LIKES ME.
WHAT-- STOP--
HOLD STILL...
YOUR IMPLANT'S ABOUT TO BLOW UP. I HAVE TO TAKE IT APART... CAREFULLY.
THERE... DONE.

I CAME TO KILL YOU.
AND YOU SAVE ME?
I'VE SEEN YOU, KORVUS...FINAL DESCENDANT OF ROOK'SHIR.

AND I KNOW YOU COULDN'T HAVE LIVED WITH YOURSELF IF YOU'D DONE IT.

NO. I DON'T THINK I COULD HAVE... WE ARE SO ALIKE, YOU--
JUMP SHIP LEAVING BAY TWO...
JUMP SHIP LEAVING BAY TWO...

MY SHIP!

MY SHIP IS *TAKING OFF*? IT'S NOT POSSIBLE.

YOUR COMRADES ARE IN NO SHAPE TO--

THE *PROFESSOR!*

WHO--?

SHUT UP-- SHUT *UP*--I'M TRYING TO *FIND* HIM.

SHUT UP...

NO...

"...HE'S *GONE*...

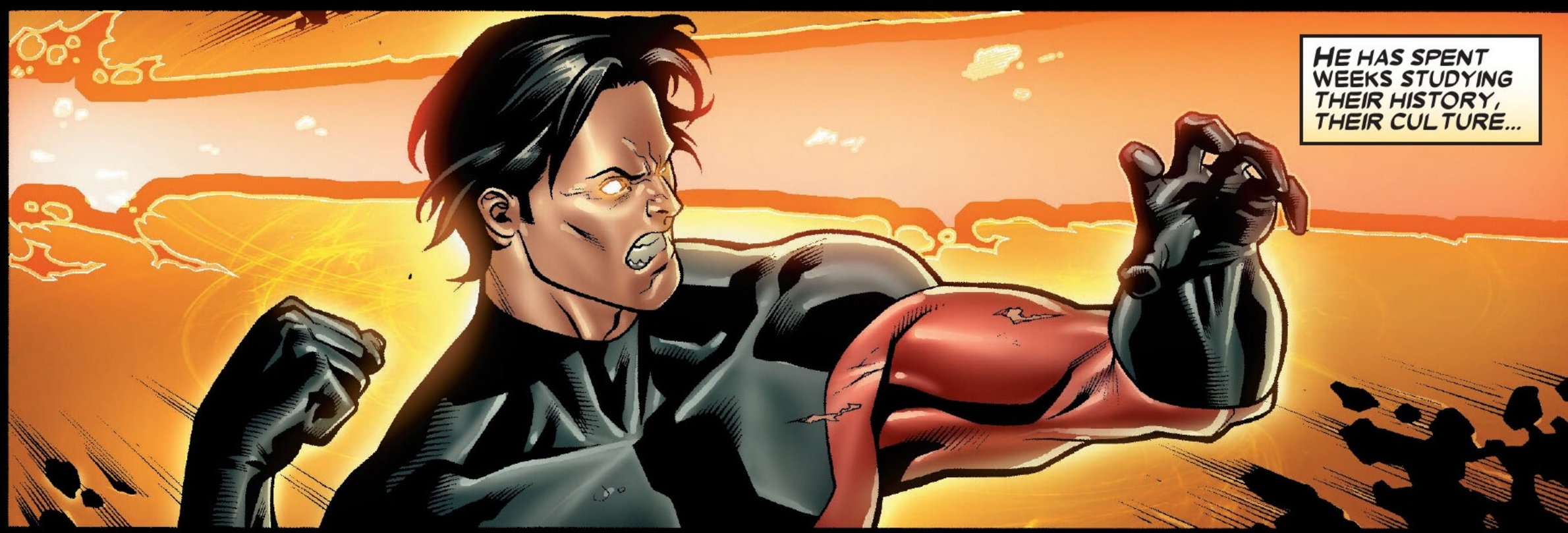
"...CHARLES IS GONE."

War of Kings #1 variant by RON LIM, SANDU FLOREA & CHRIS SOTOMAYOR

UNCANNY X-MEN 480

HIS NAME IS VULCAN.

AND HE IS HERE TO EXACT VENGEANCE ON THE SHI'AR EMPIRE.



HE HAS SPENT WEEKS STUDYING THEIR HISTORY, THEIR CULTURE...

...WEEKS FORMULATING THE PERFECT PLAN...

...A PLAN WHICH BEGINS WITH THE DEFEAT OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD.

BUT THINGS ARE NOT GOING ACCORDING TO PLAN.
RRRAAAAAA!
KEEP ON HIM!
FULL PRESSURE ATTACK!
THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SHI'AR EMPIRE CHAPTER SIX:
VULCAN'S PROGRESS
CREDUX

YOU'RE GOING NOWHERE, EARTHER.
THIS IS YOUR LAST STAND.
AHHHH!
IMPULSE!
NOOO!
THAT'S THE LAST OF MY SOLDIERS YOU SLAY.
SURRENDER NOW AND YOU MAY YET LIVE.

I'VE GOT ANOTHER IDEA... GLADIATOR...
WHY DON'T YOU SURRENDER...
...AND I'LL PROMISE NOT TO KILL ALL YOUR MEN!
COSMO! NEUTRON!
FORGET TITAN AND GET THIS STAR-KILLING BASTARD!

YES, VICE-CHANCELLOR, THAT'S *EXACTLY* WHAT I'M SAYING...

...IF HE ISN'T *SLAIN* DOWN THERE, THAT IS.

IS THERE NO CHANCE HE'LL DEFEAT THE IMPERIAL GUARD, THEN?

HE'S POWERFUL, SIR, *THAT* I'VE SEEN...

BUT HE'S *UNPREPARED*. I MADE CERTAIN OF THAT.

HE DOESN'T COMPREHEND WHAT HE'S *TRULY* UP AGAINST.

I SAW THAT IN HIS FACE AS *GLADIATOR* TORE OUR SHIP APART AND CAST HIM DOWN TO THAT HALF-DEAD MOON.

THEN HE MAY INDEED SUIT OUR PURPOSES, CAPTAIN.

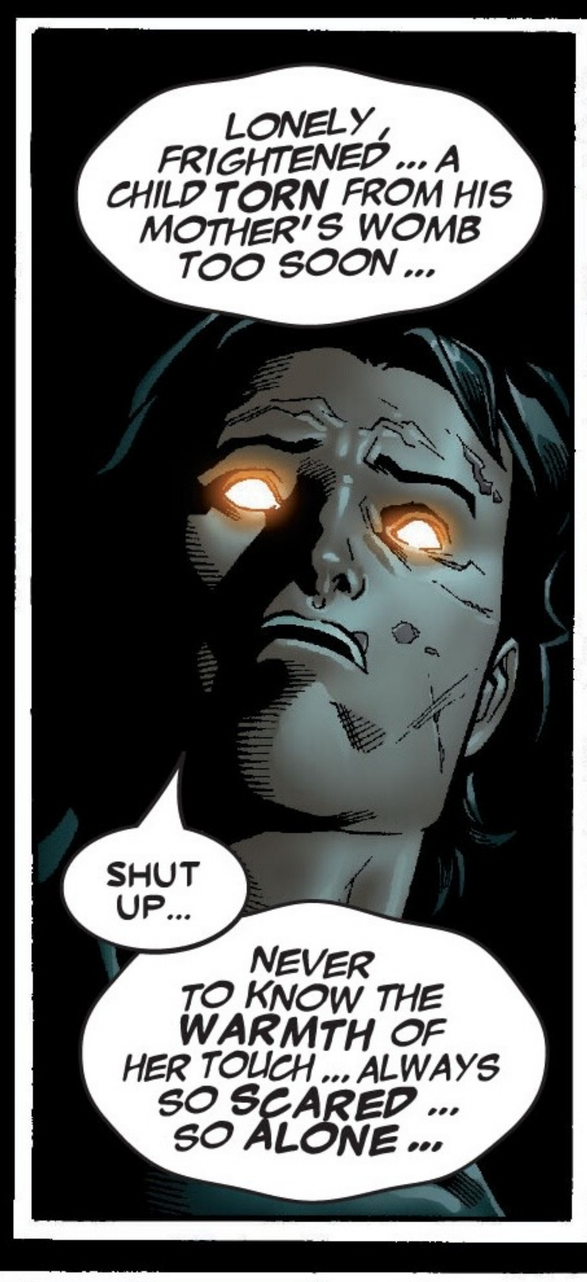
AN EARTHER THAT POWERFUL AND OBSESSED WITH GREAT D'KEN...
I KNOW JUST WHICH CELL TO PLACE HIM IN.
THAT WAS MY HOPE, SIR...
...THAT THE TRUE EMPIRE MAY RISE ONCE MORE.
THAT IS THE HOPE OF MANY.
I'VE SENT TEAMS TO RETRIEVE YOU AND ANY SURVIVORS AMONG YOUR CREW...
...WE'LL SPEAK AGAIN SOON.
AYE, VICE-CHANCELLOR.
WHAT IS YOUR COMMAND?
DIRECT COMMUNICATION WITH GLADIATOR.
TRANSMIT THE FOLLOWING TO HIS IMPLANT ON CODE HECTOR PRIORITY...
READY TO TRANSMIT.

FEEL *THAT*, MURDERER?!

FEEL YOUR POWER *LEAVING?*

NNYAAHH!

MENTOR, DO YOU HAVE IT?
YES...HIS *MIND* IS HIS WEAKNESS.
ORACLE, NIGHTSIDE...YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO.
IT IS DONE.
WHAT--?
WELCOME TO YOUR NIGHTMARE, EARTHER...
WHAT IS THIS?
YOU THINK *DARKNESS* IS GOING TO HELP?



THANKS... YOU ALMOST HAD ME FOR A SECOND.

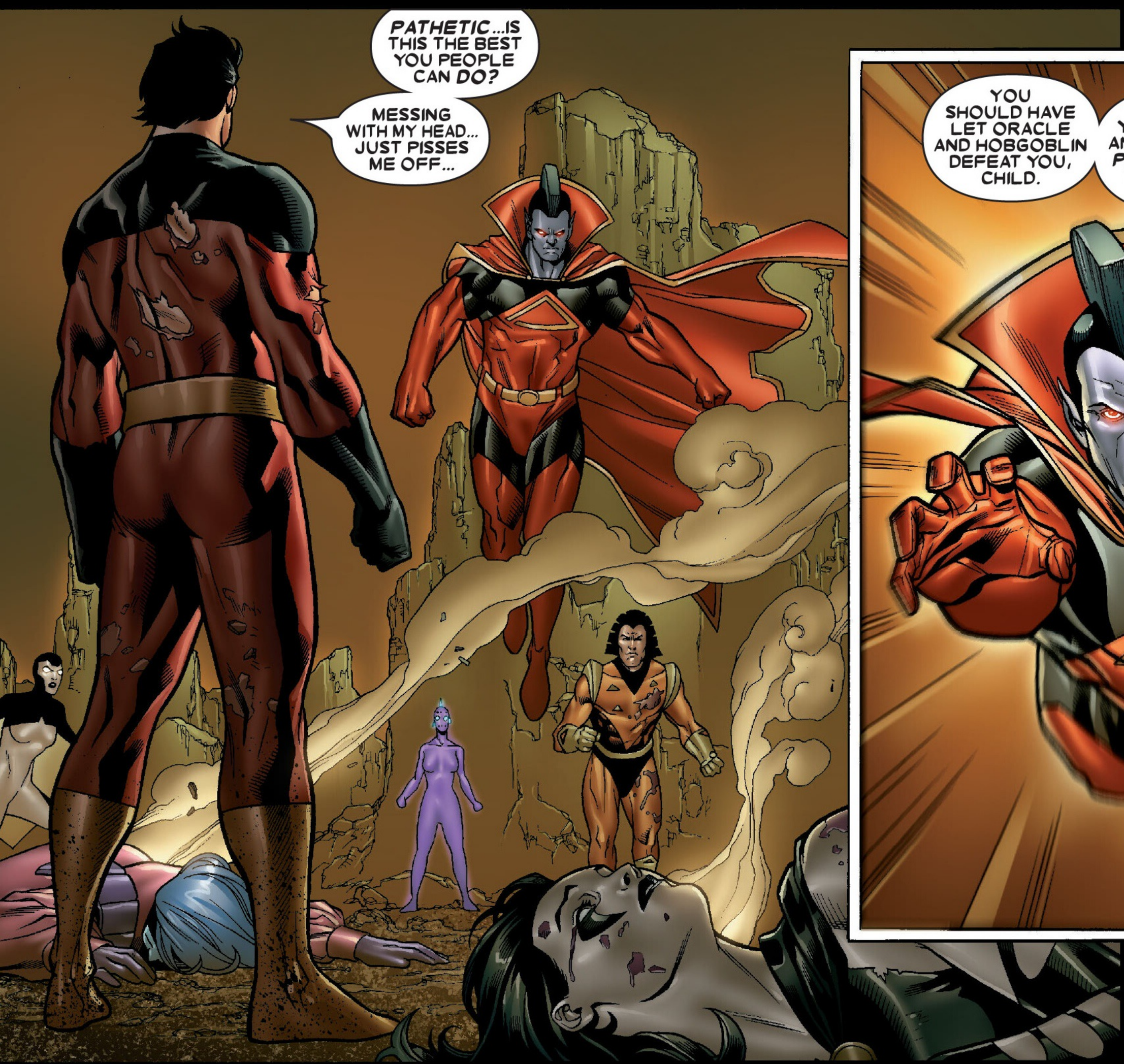
BUT THEN I REMEMBERED WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO HAVE SOMEONE ELSE IN MY HEAD.

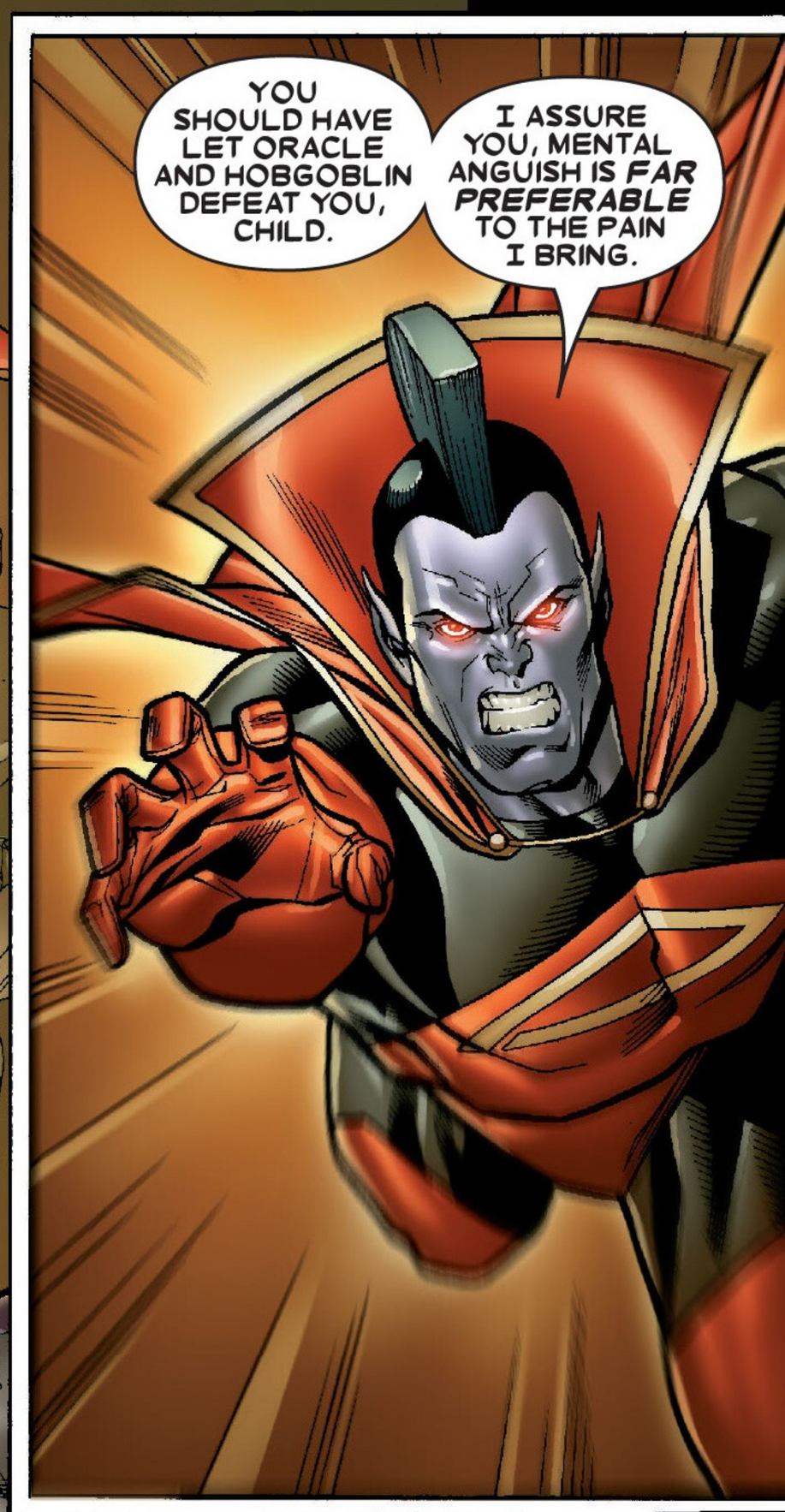
I JUST HOPE YOU'RE STILL LINKED WITH HER!

AAAARRRGGG!

OR THAT SHE'S AT LEAST CLOSE BY...

AHHH!
UHHT!


PATHETIC...IS THIS THE BEST YOU PEOPLE CAN DO?
MESSING WITH MY HEAD... JUST PISSES ME OFF...

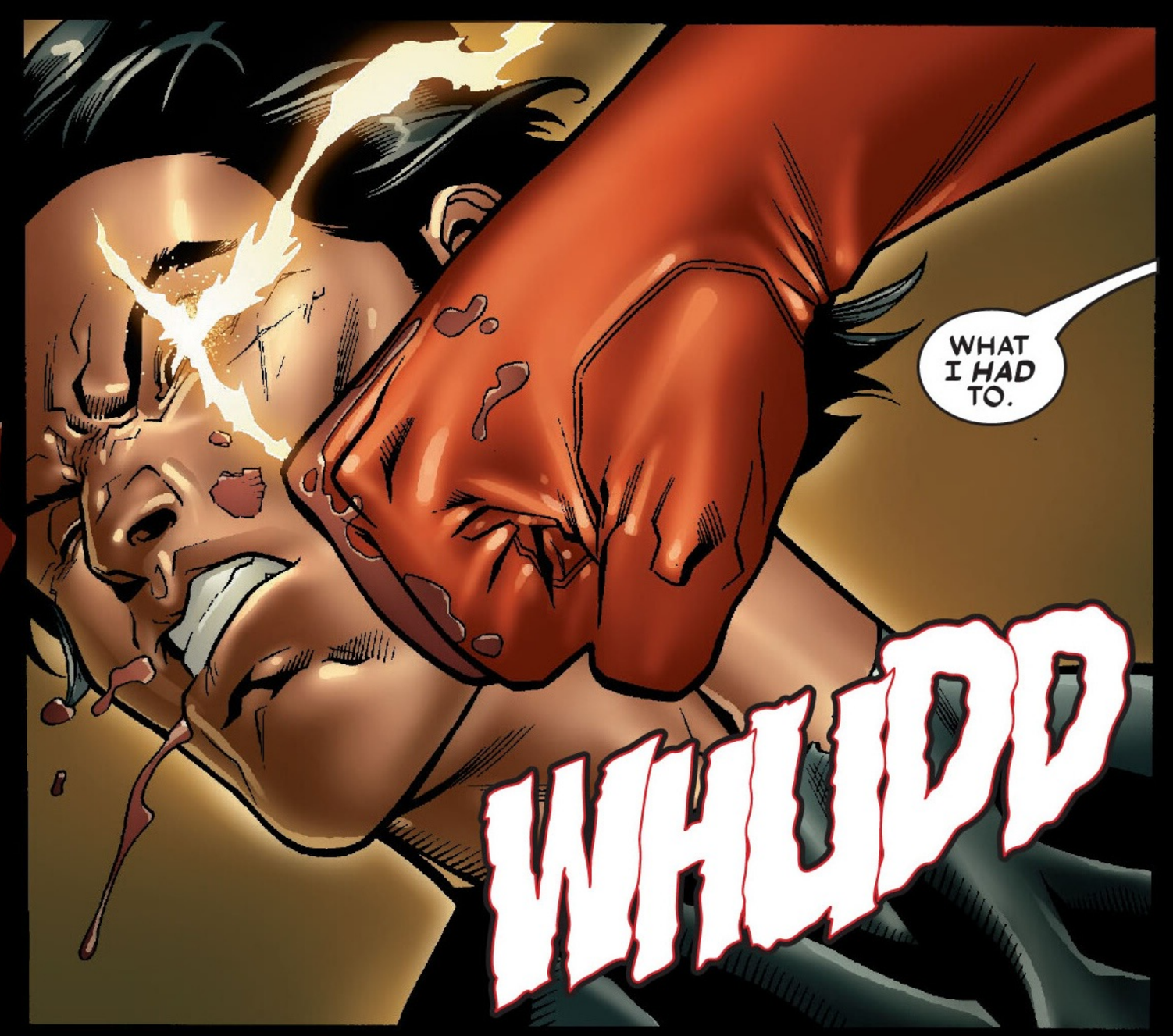

YOU SHOULD HAVE LET ORACLE AND HOBGOBLIN DEFEAT YOU, CHILD.
I ASSURE YOU, MENTAL ANGUISH IS FAR PREFERABLE TO THE PAIN I BRING.

WHY CAN'T I TOUCH YOU?!

BECAUSE--

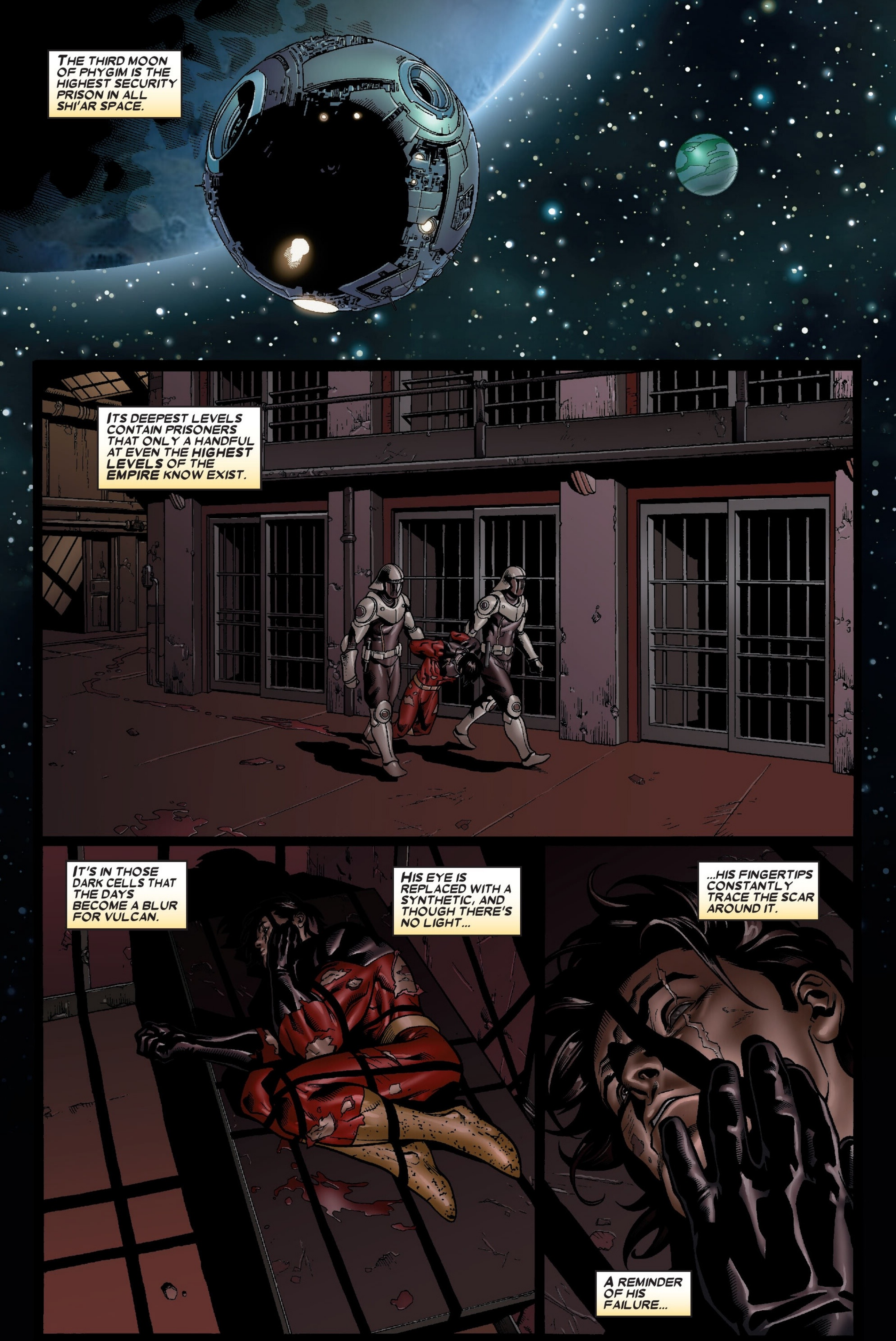
--I BELIEVE MYSELF UNTOUCHABLE.

YYYAAAAIIIIEEEEGGGG!

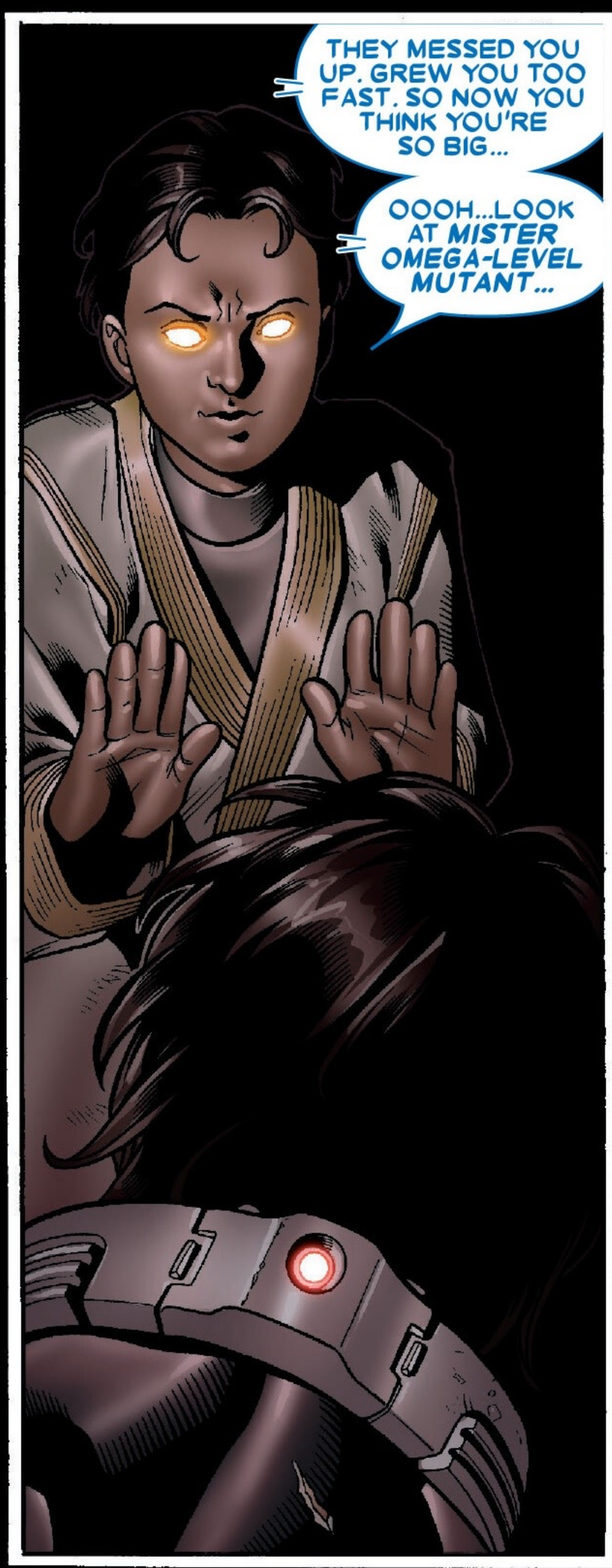


HAVE HIM BOUND AND TAKEN TO THE MEDICAL BAY, THEN TAKE HIM TO THE BRIG FOR TRANSPORT.
WE'RE TAKING HIM ALIVE?!
HAVE YOU SEEN WHAT HE DID TO US?

HE WILL BE TAKEN INTO CUSTODY. THOSE ARE OUR ORDERS.
BRING POWER LEECHES, AND A NEURAL SHACKLE TO NEUTRALIZE HIS MUTANT ABILITIES. NOW!
DID YOU TAKE IN ALL OF ORACLE'S MENTAL SCAN?
YES...
THE MADMAN IS THE SON OF THE OUTLAW, CORSAIR.
PREPARE A REPORT FOR THE VICE-CHANCELLOR.
TELL HIM THE X-MEN MAY NOT BE FAR BEHIND THIS ONE.


THE THIRD MOON OF PHYGIM IS THE HIGHEST SECURITY PRISON IN ALL SHI'AR SPACE.
ITS DEEPEST LEVELS CONTAIN PRISONERS THAT ONLY A HANDFUL AT EVEN THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE EMPIRE KNOW EXIST.
IT'S IN THOSE DARK CELLS THAT THE DAYS BECOME A BLUR FOR VULCAN.
HIS EYE IS REPLACED WITH A SYNTHETIC, AND THOUGH THERE'S NO LIGHT...
...HIS FINGERTIPS CONSTANTLY TRACE THE SCAR AROUND IT.
A REMINDER OF HIS FAILURE...

...AS IS THE DEVICE ATTACHED TO HIM THAT DULLS HIS SENSES...
...CUTTING HIM OFF FROM THE SOURCE...
...LEAVING HIM TRAPPED SOMEWHERE BETWEEN DREAM AND DARKNESS...
THEY WERE RIGHT ABOUT YOU...
...YOU KNOW THAT?
YOU'RE JUST A WIDDLE BABY.
...SHUT UP ...YOU... SHUT...


THEY MESSED YOU UP. GREW YOU TOO FAST. SO NOW YOU THINK YOU'RE SO BIG...
OOOH...LOOK AT MISTER OMEGA-LEVEL MUTANT...

CAN'T EVEN WIPE HIS OWN BUTT WITHOUT--
SHUT UP!

YOU KNOW WHAT YESTERDAY WAS?
DO YOU, WIDDLE BABY?

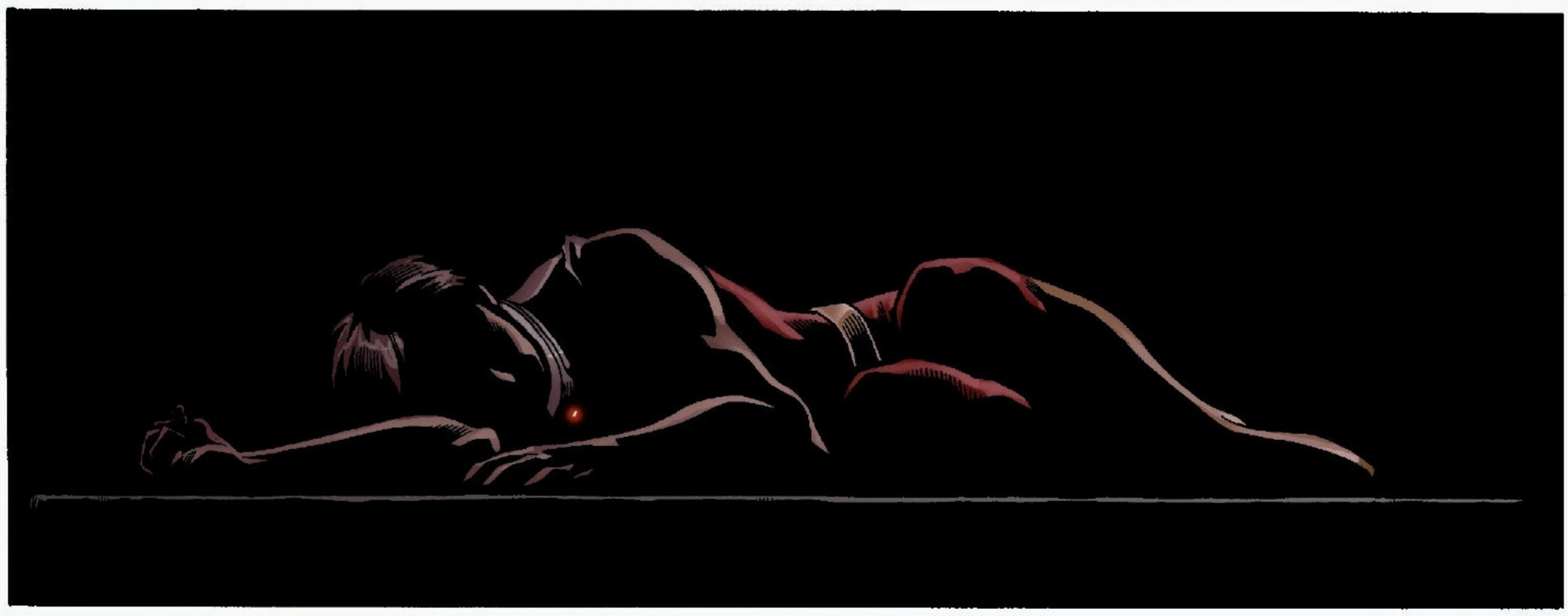
YOUR BIRTHDAY... AND I FIGURED OUT HOW OLD YOU REALLY ARE...
WHICH WAS A LOT MORE WORK THAN YOU'D THINK.

FIRST YOU SUBTRACT THE YEARS YOU WERE SUSPENDED IN A HUNK OF ASTEROID...
...THEN YOU DEDUCT THE YEARS THE SHI'AR AGED YOU...
...CARRY THE DECIMAL POINT...

...AND I THINK YOU'RE FINALLY A FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD.
THOUGH, MATURE-WISE, I'M THINKING CLOSER TO THIRTEEN.
...YOU'RE NOT REAL... LEAVE ME... ALONE...

IS THAT REALLY WHAT YOU ARE?
JUST SOME WEAK LITTLE KID WHO THOUGHT HE WAS ALL GROWN UP?

I CAN'T EVEN BELIEVE I'M YOU...
...GO AWAY... JUST...GO AWAY...
YOU GO AWAY.



IS IT DAYS OR WEEKS BEFORE HIS CELL DOOR OPENS AND THE SOLDIER ENTERS?
HE'S CEASED TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE.

...GO AWAY... YOU'RE NOT... REAL...GO--
WE HAVEN'T MUCH TIME, EARTHER, DON'T WASTE IT TALKING NONSENSE.

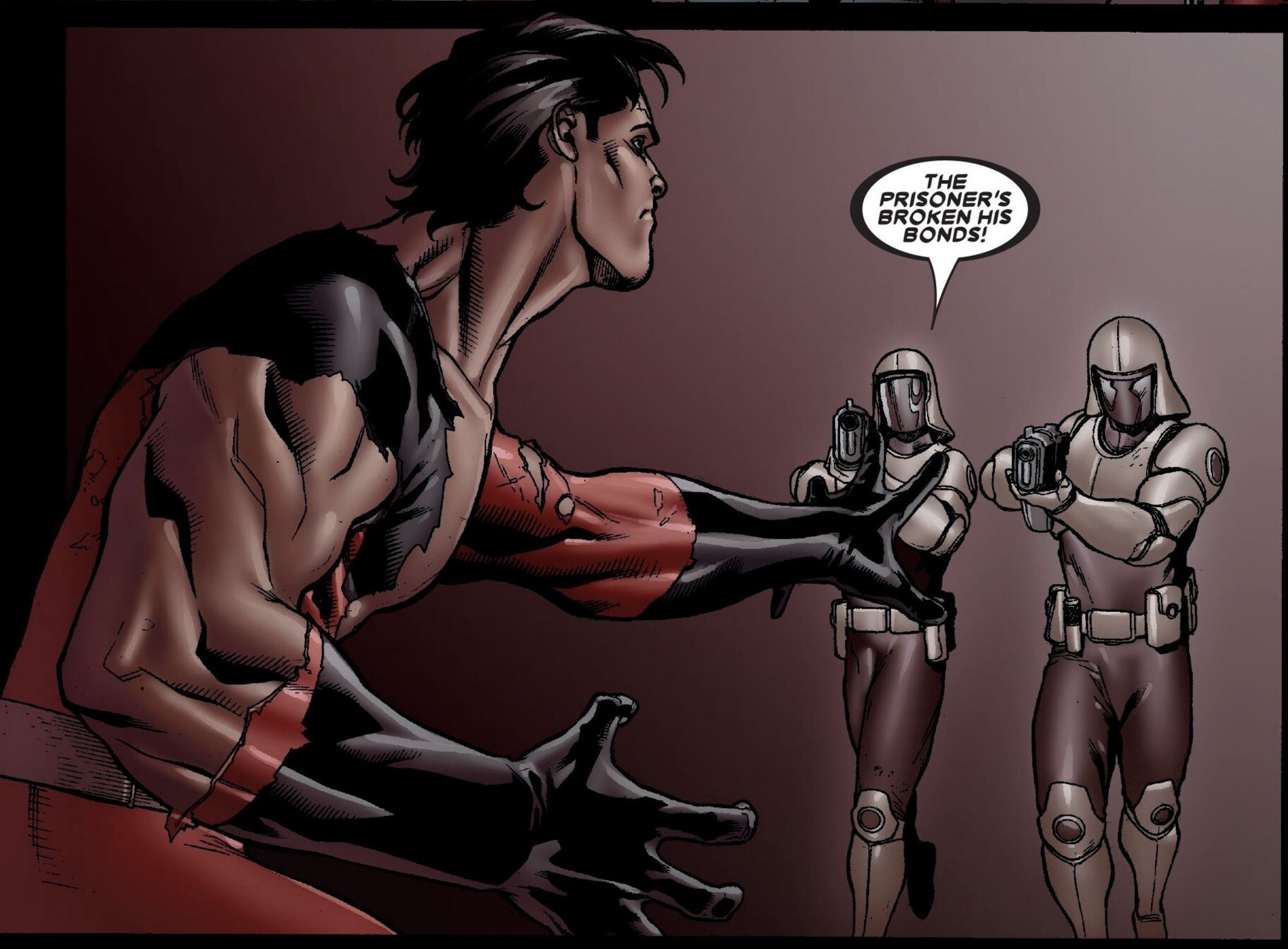
VEEEP
POP
POP

...UHN... WHAT...?
REST FOR A MOMENT...REMOVING THE NEURAL DAMPENERS CAN BE DISORIENTING...

YOU... YOU'RE A SHI'AR...
WHY WOULD YOU HELP ME...?
I SERVE THE SECRET ORDER, THAT THE TRUE EMPIRE MAY RISE ONCE MORE.
AND MY ORDERS WERE TO AID YOU...TO TELL YOU THERE ARE THOSE WHO KNOW OF THE WRONG DONE YOU, GABRIEL SUMMERS...
DON'T CALL ME THAT.
WE ARE OUT OF TIME, FRIEND.
YOUR PATH LIES TWO LEVELS DOWN...MAY YOU HAVE THE POWER TO GET THERE.
YOU-- HALT!
ESCAPE! SOUND THE ALARM!

GO!
I'LL HOLD THEM OFF!
WAIT...I DON'T --

AHHHH!


THE PRISONER'S BROKEN HIS BONDS!

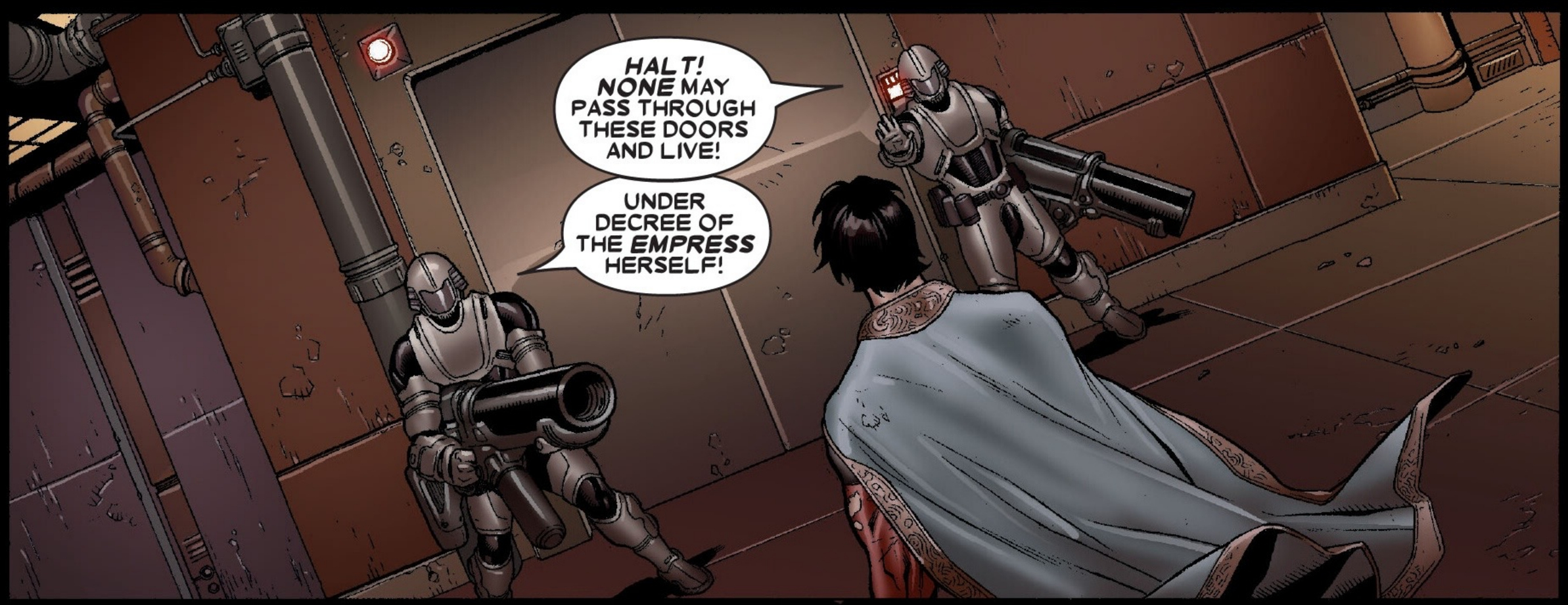
FIRE AT WILL!

DIDN'T THEY EVEN TELL YOU WHAT I WAS?

AAAAHEE!

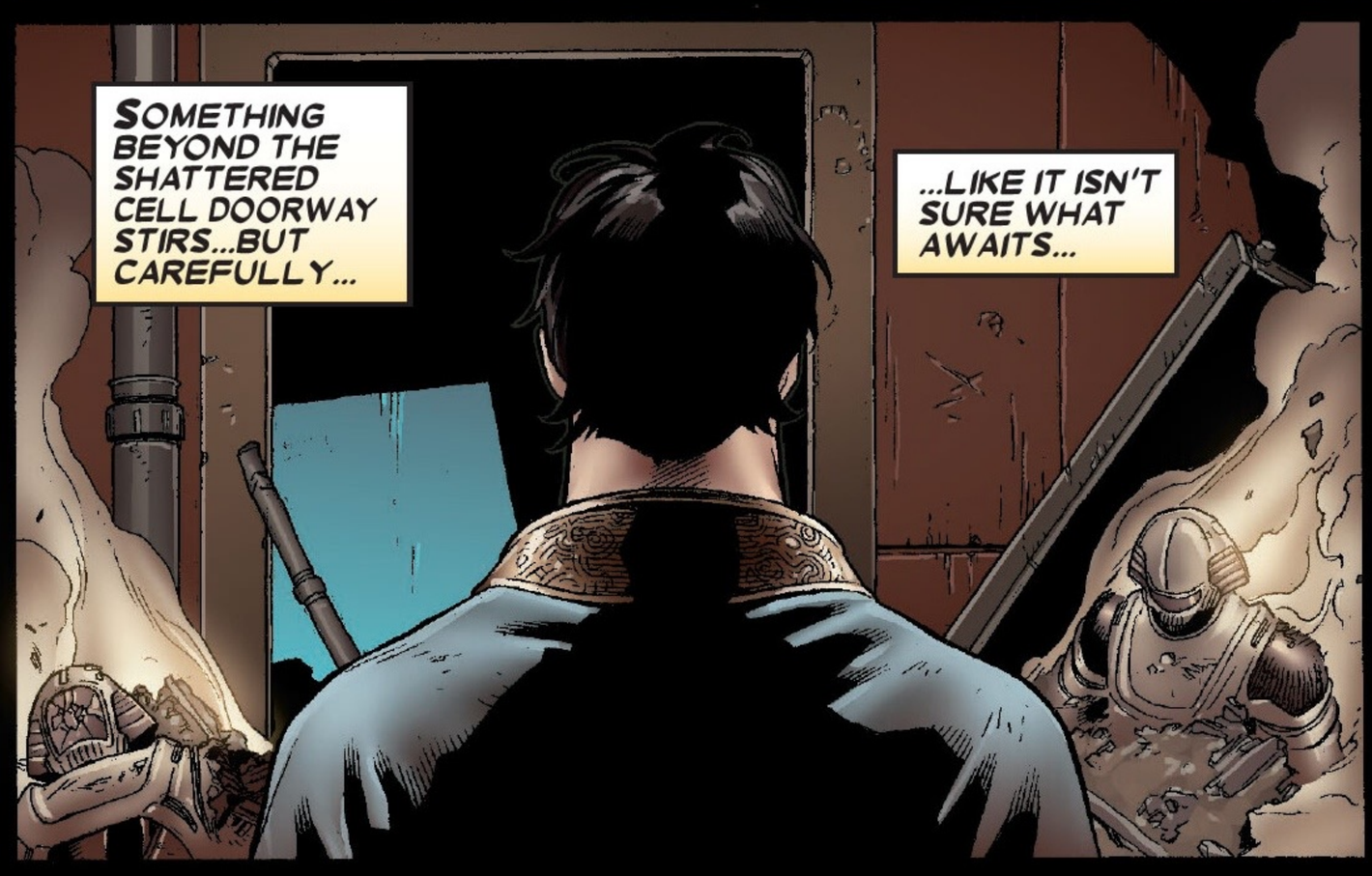
IDIOTS.

SO, TWO LEVELS DOWN...?
AND WHAT AM I GOING TO FIND THERE, SOLDIER OF THE SECRET ORDER?


HALT! NONE MAY PASS THROUGH THESE DOORS AND LIVE!
UNDER DECREE OF THE EMPRESS HERSELF!

AND WE WOULDN'T WANT TO PISS OFF THE EMPRESS, WOULD WE?

DIE NOW.


SOMETHING BEYOND THE SHATTERED CELL DOORWAY STIRS...BUT CAREFULLY...
...LIKE IT ISN'T SURE WHAT AWAITS...

COME OUT, WHOEVER YOU ARE...
...I'M NOT HERE TO HURT YOU.

OF COURSE YOU'RE *NOT*... NONE MAY HARM ME.
YOU...?
MY *SISTER*, THE EMPRESS, DECREED THAT NO HAND WOULD TOUCH ME...
...BEFORE SHE HAD HER *SOLDIERS* LOCK ME AWAY FOR ALL TIME...
...TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF THE *THRONE*.

UNCANNY X-MEN 481

TRELLERRI-RETREAT FOR THE SHI'AR HIGH COUNCIL AND ROYALTY
WHERE IS CHANCELLOR ARAKI?
HE HAD A COMMUNICATION HE HAD TO ATTEND...IS SOMETHING NOT TO YOUR PLEASING, MAJESTRIX?
NO, KARANDA, IT'S NOTHING LIKE THAT...EVERYTHING IS BEAUTIFUL HERE.
IT'S HELPED ME MORE THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE... I WAS SO...WELL, YOU SAW ME.
I SAW NOTHING, EMPRESS LILANDRA, AS ALWAYS.
THAT'S KIND OF YOU, BUT I WAS A MESS...
CASSANDRA NOVA NEARLY DESTROYED MY MIND.
BUT I THINK IT MAY BE TIME FOR ME TO RETURN TO MY DUTIES...
I'M SURE THE CHANCELLOR WILL BE PLEASED TO HEAR IT.
YES, I AGREE...IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN ONE OF OURS THAT FREED HER, IN CASE THEY FAILED...
STILL, I'M STUNNED AT HOW QUICKLY THIS HAS TRANSPIRED.
WILL YOU BE NEEDING ASSISTANCE ON YOUR PART, THEN?

NO, K'TOR... I DO NOT NEED ASSISTANCE.
AND REMEMBER WHO IT IS YOU'RE ADDRESSING.
YES, CHANCELLOR ARAKI. FORGIVE ME.
CHANCELLOR, THE EMPRESS HAS BEEN LOOKING FOR--
BBRAAATZ
BRAAZZ
BRRAATTZ

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SHI'AR EMPIRE CHAPTER SEVEN:

CROSSING THE RUBICON

SOMEWHERE FAR, FAR AWAY...

WELL, WHAT MORE ARE WE TO DO, IF--
NO, I'M TALKING NOW, KURT, AND I SAY WE STOP LISTENING TO THE GUY WHO ATTACKED US ALL!

I CAN'T BE THE ONLY ONE WITH SOME TRUST ISSUES HERE?

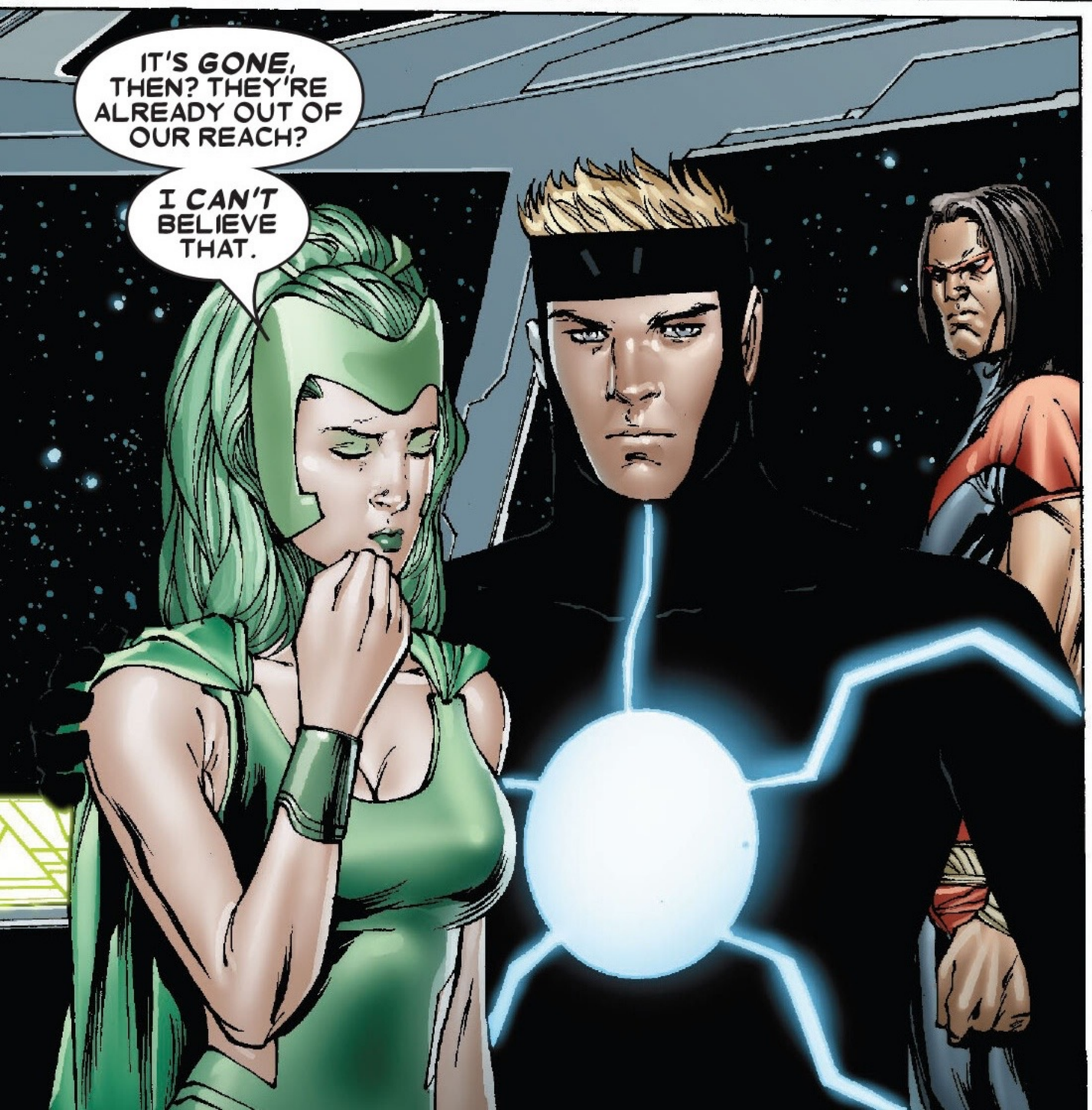
JAMES, I TOLD YOU, KORVUS WAS FORCED TO DO ALL THAT. HE WAS SENT AFTER ME.
AND IF I MEANT TO KILL YOU, WARPATH, I'D HAVE DONE IT BEFORE YOU CAME TO.

THAT'S IT! LET'S GO, YOU--
STOP IT! RIGHT NOW!

THE PROFESSOR AND DARWIN ARE *OUT THERE*, WITH PEOPLE WHO WANT TO KILL CHARLES...IF HE'S *LUCKY*.
RACHEL SAYS SHE'S SEEN KORVUS'S *MIND*, AND SHE TRUSTS HIM. THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME...

...AND EVEN IF IT *WASN'T*, HE'S THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN HELP US RIGHT NOW.
YES...SO, HOW *DO* WE CATCH YOUR SHIP?

THAT'S WHAT I WAS ATTEMPTING TO SAY, NIGHTCRAWLER... YOU CAN'T. IT'S A *JUMPSHIP*.
MEANING IT CREATES ITS *OWN* STARGATES.


IT'S *GONE*, THEN? THEY'RE ALREADY OUT OF OUR REACH?
I *CAN'T* BELIEVE THAT.

THERE MAY BE ANOTHER WAY, IF YOU TWO ARE WHAT RACHEL SAYS YOU ARE.
ME AND *LORNA*? WHAT CAN *WE* DO?

YOU CAN HELP US CREATE A STARGATE OF OUR OWN.
WE CAN *WHAT?*

EXPLAIN TO ME HOW THIS WOULD HAPPEN?
IT'S SIMPLE, BEFORE THEY BUILT THE *GATES*, SHI'AR CRUISERS LIKE THIS *ALL* MADE THEIR OWN JUMPS.

WE ONLY HAVE TO BRING THE JUMP ENGINES BACK ON LINE...BUT THEY'LL NEED A *POWER SOURCE.*
AND THAT'S WHAT *WE* WILL BE.

HAVOK AND RACHEL AND I WILL FEED THE ENGINES, AND POLARIS WILL CONTROL THEM...
WHAT DO *I* DO?

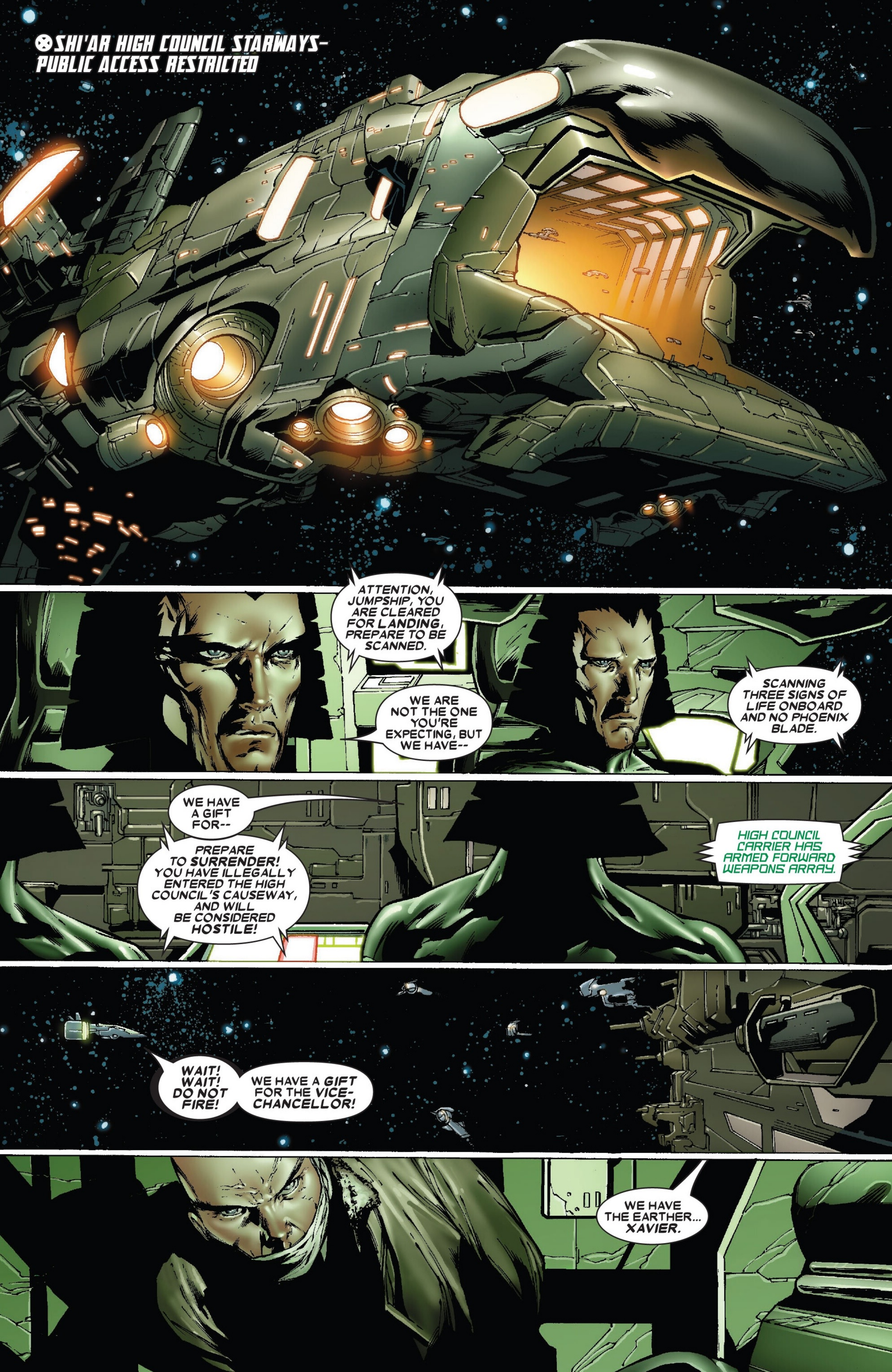
OUR POWER ISN'T THE FUEL THEY WERE *BUILT FOR.*
SO YOU *STOP IT* FROM RIPPING THEM APART AND LEAVING US STRANDED OUTSIDE SPACE AND TIME.

SO, IT IS DANGEROUS, THEN...HOW REFRESHING.
IT'S WORSE THAN THAT. ASSUMING WE SURVIVE...
...WHEN WE ARRIVE, THE MOST POWERFUL OF US WILL BE SPENT, AND YOUR IMPULSE DRIVE WILL BE OFFLINE.

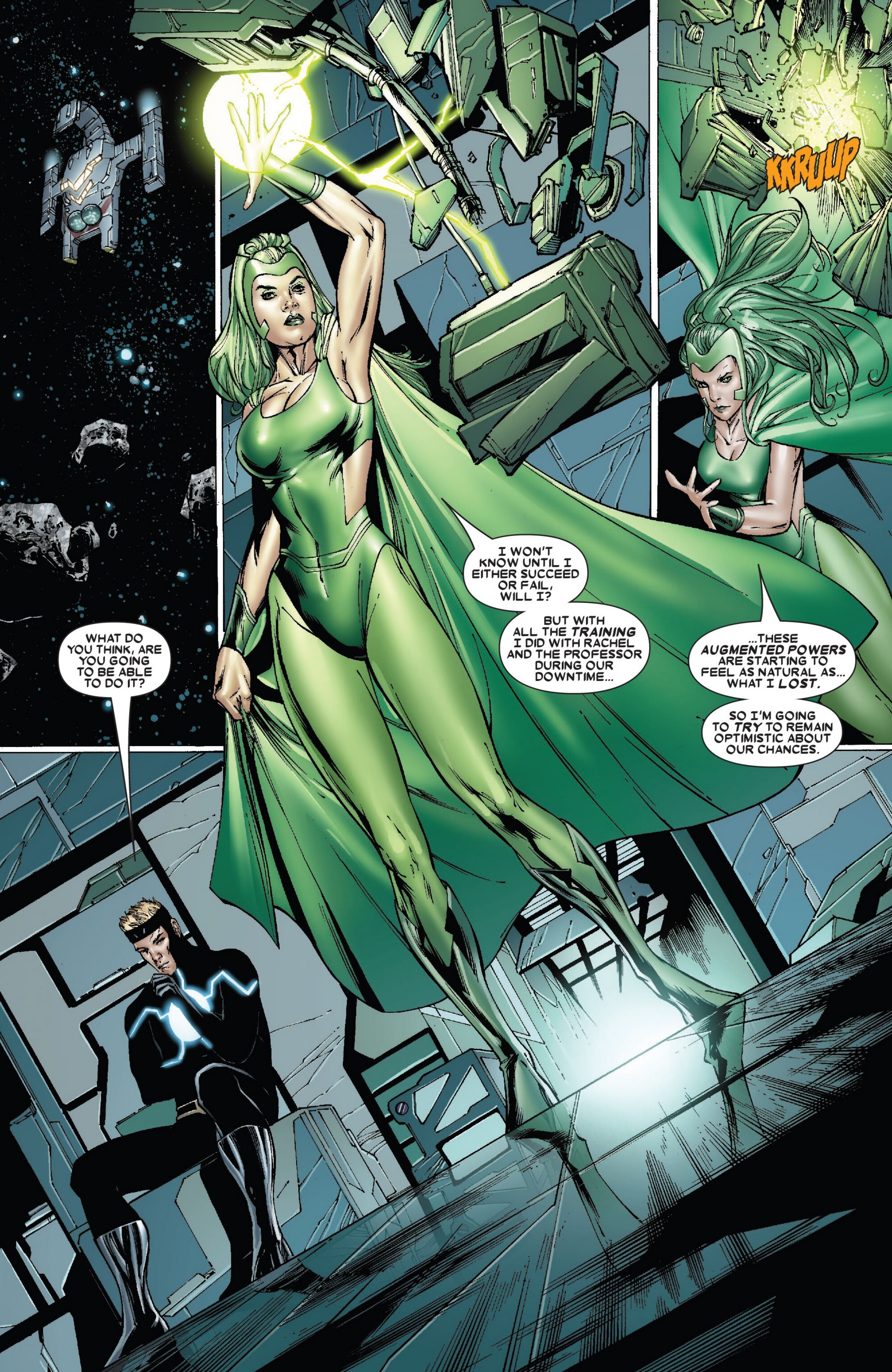
SO, FOLLOWING YOUR TEAMMATES WHERE MY SHIP'S JUMP COORDINATES WERE SET IS OUT OF THE QUESTION.
WE NEED SOMEWHERE SAFE, TO REST AND REFIT THE ENGINES...BEFORE WE LEAP INTO THE FRAY.

THE STARJAMMERS?
THAT'S WHAT I WAS GOING TO SAY.
THE PROFESSOR HAD THEIR MOST RECENT LOCATION IN THE NAVCOM.
YOU EARTHERS KNOW THE STARJAMMERS?
CORSAIR IS ALEX'S FATHER.

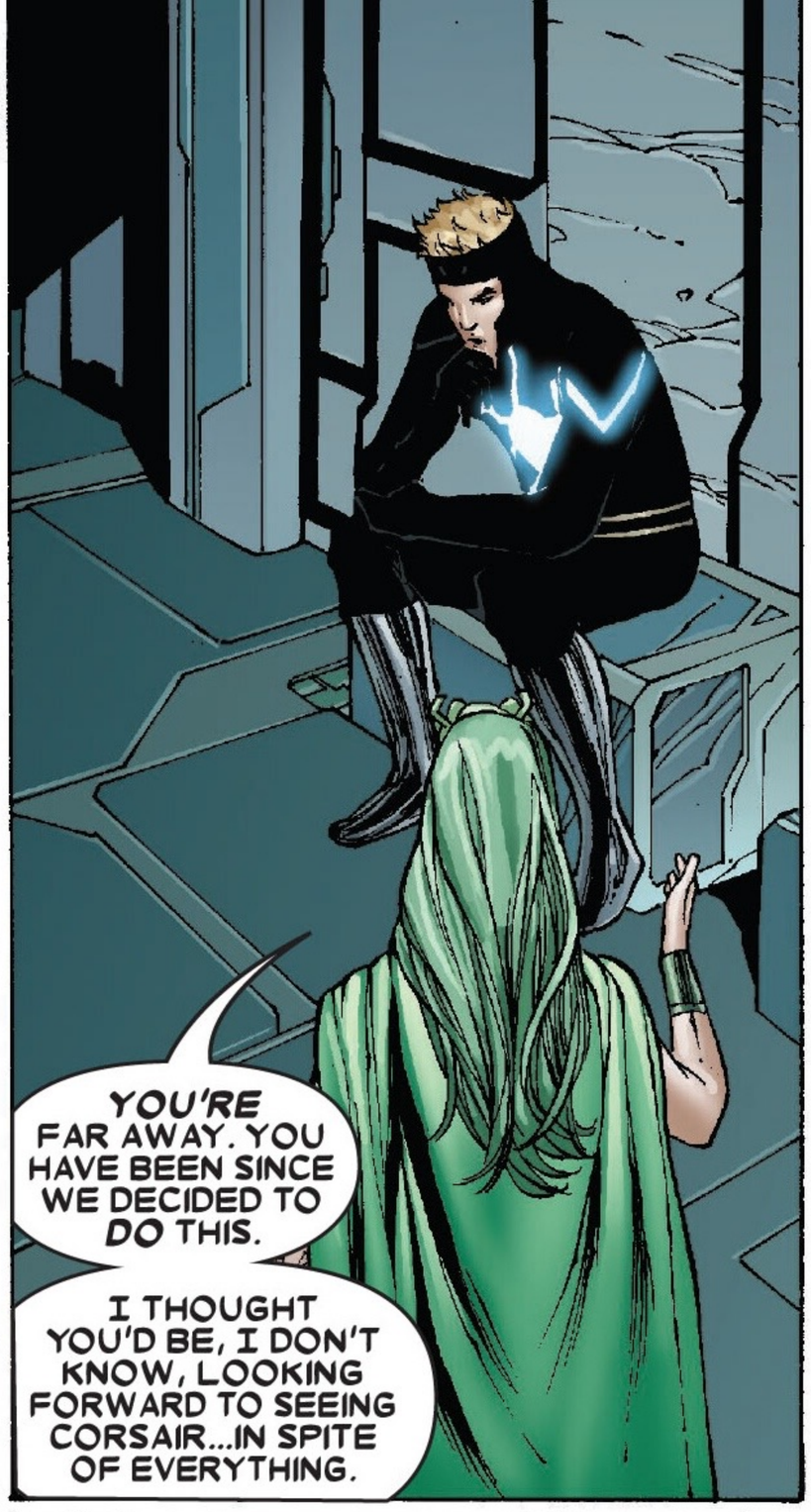
THEN MAYBE OUR LUCK IS NOT ALL BAD, LITTLE PHOENIX GIRL...


SHI'AR HIGH COUNCIL STARWAYS–
PUBLIC ACCESS RESTRICTED
ATTENTION, JUMPSHIP, YOU ARE CLEARED FOR LANDING, PREPARE TO BE SCANNED.
WE ARE NOT THE ONE YOU'RE EXPECTING, BUT WE HAVE--
SCANNING THREE SIGNS OF LIFE ONBOARD AND NO PHOENIX BLADE.
WE HAVE A GIFT FOR--
PREPARE TO SURRENDER! YOU HAVE ILLEGALLY ENTERED THE HIGH COUNCIL'S CAUSEWAY, AND WILL BE CONSIDERED HOSTILE!
HIGH COUNCIL CARRIER HAS ARMED FORWARD WEAPONS ARRAY.
WAIT! WAIT! DO NOT FIRE!
WE HAVE A GIFT FOR THE VICE-CHANCELLOR!
WE HAVE THE EARTHER... XAVIER.

JUMPSHIP, HOLD POSITION.
IDIOT. THEY WILL KILL US AND THEN TAKE HIM.
YOU KNOW THE RULES ABOUT COUNCIL SPACE.
THEY WERE PRESET JUMP COORDINATES. WHAT MORE COULD I DO?
THEY WILL OVERLOOK IT FOR THIS PRIZE.
JUMPSHIP, YOU ARE CLEARED FOR LANDING IN BAY SEVEN.
DO NOT ATTEMPT TO DEPLANE IN THE HANGAR BAY. WE WILL BOARD YOU.
UNDERSTOOD, JUMPSHIP COMING IN.
THEY'RE GOING TO KILL US, I AM CERTAIN OF IT.
I AM GOING TO KILL YOU IF THEY DO NOT.
NOW BE SILENT.


KKRUUP
I WON'T KNOW UNTIL I EITHER SUCCEED OR FAIL, WILL I?
BUT WITH ALL THE *TRAINING* I DID WITH RACHEL AND THE PROFESSOR DURING OUR DOWNTIME...
...THESE *AUGMENTED POWERS* ARE STARTING TO FEEL AS NATURAL AS... WHAT I *LOST*.
SO I'M GOING TO *TRY* TO REMAIN OPTIMISTIC ABOUT OUR CHANCES.
WHAT DO YOU THINK, ARE YOU GOING TO BE ABLE TO DO IT?

BUT HOW LONG UNTIL WE'RE READY, YOU THINK?
WHO KNOWS? HOPEFULLY SOON.
THEY'VE BEEN WORKING ON THOSE ENGINES ALL DAY ALREADY...

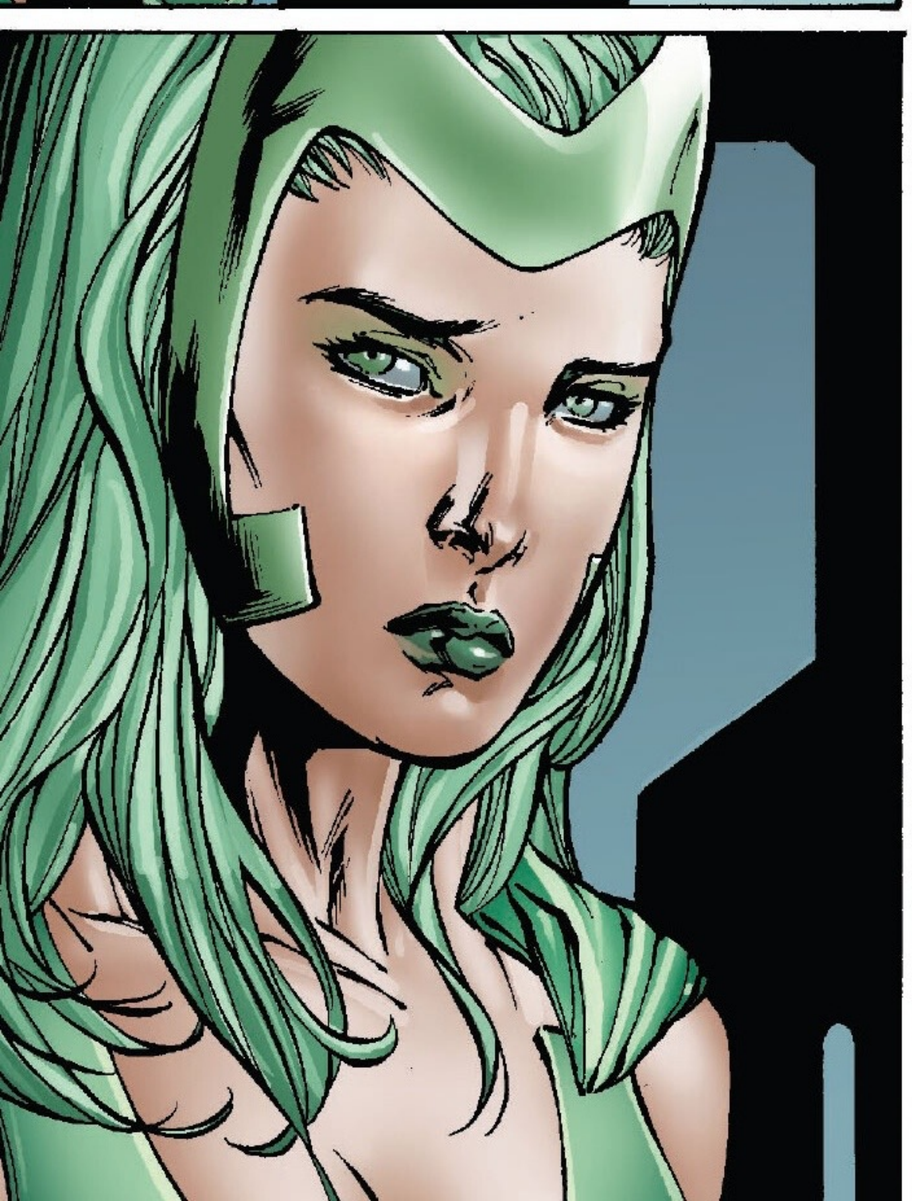

YOU'RE FAR AWAY. YOU HAVE BEEN SINCE WE DECIDED TO DO THIS.
I THOUGHT YOU'D BE, I DON'T KNOW, LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING CORSAIR...IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING.

I SHOULD BE... IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME, BUT WITH EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED...
HE DOESN'T EVEN KNOW ABOUT VULCAN... ABOUT HIS OTHER SON.

AND WE'VE JUST BLOWN IT AT EVERY TURN...FIRST WE GET STUCK OUT HERE...
THEN WE SAVE THOSE SHI'AR AND THEY KIDNAP CHARLES...
IT WAS CHARLES WHO BROUGHT THEM ONBOARD.

IT DOESN'T MATTER. I SHOULD'VE SEEN IT, LORNA.
AND NOW WE'RE RUNNING TO MY FATHER FOR HELP, INSTEAD OF BRINGING IT TO HIM...

NOW ALL WE'VE GOT IS BAD NEWS.



OH, ALEX...
YOU'RE TWICE THE MAN CORSAIR IS, IF YOU'D ONLY REALIZE IT.

DO WE HAVE AN *IDEA* HOW MUCH MORE TIME THIS WILL *TAKE?*

IT'S *NEARLY* READY, NIGHTCRAWLER...BUT I HAVE NOT WORKED ON ENGINES LIKE THIS SINCE I WAS A *BOY.*

WAS YOUR FATHER A *MECHANIC* FOR THE EMPIRE?

NO, THIS WAS AFTER HIS *DEATH*...WHEN I WAS IN THE *SLAVE WORKFORCE...*

BEFORE I BECAME A MAN, AND THEY LOCKED ME AWAY.

I...I'M *USELESS* HERE, RIGHT? ALL THE *HEAVY LIFTING* IS OVER.

GO AND GET SOME REST, BOTH OF YOU...I'LL FINISH THIS ON MY OWN...

I CAN'T SLEEP THIS NIGHT ANYWAY.

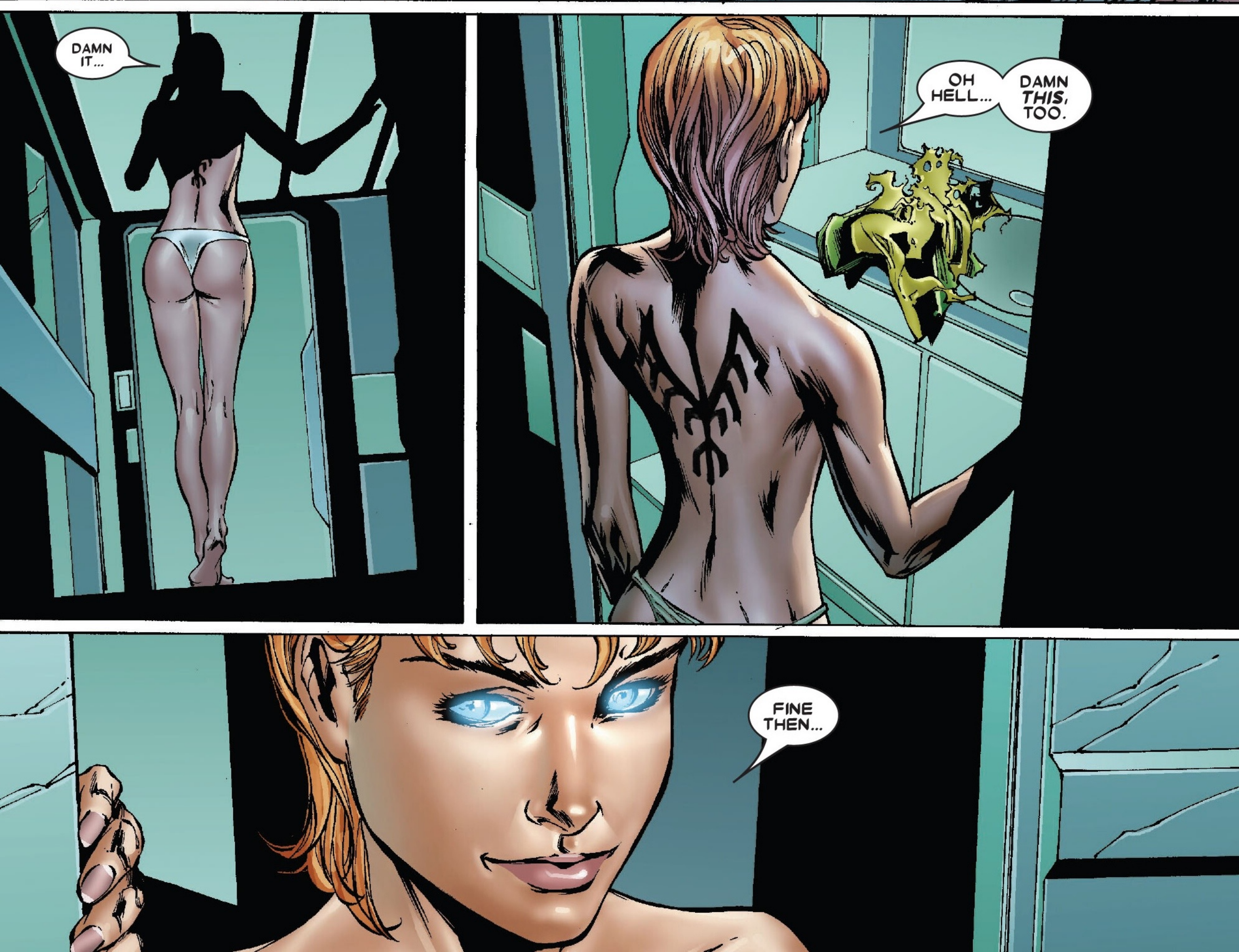
IT APPEARS KORVUS HAS BEEN THROUGH *WORSE TREATMENT* THAN MANY OF US.

IT *APPEARS.*
YOU STILL DO NOT TRUST HIM?
THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT HIM...SOME SCENT HE'S GIVING OFF THAT I CAN'T PLACE.

BUT HE DOESN'T SEEM *SUICIDAL*, SO I GUESS I TRUST HIM WITH THOSE ENGINES.
I WORRY MORE ABOUT *RACHEL*, AND THE EFFECT HE HAS ALREADY HAD ON HER.
SHE TOOK SOME OF THE *PHOENIX FORCE* FROM HIS *SWORD* WITHIN HERSELF.

EVEN THE *SMALLEST SPARK* OF THE PHOENIX IN RACHEL GREY...
THIS COULD BE A DANGER TO US ALL...

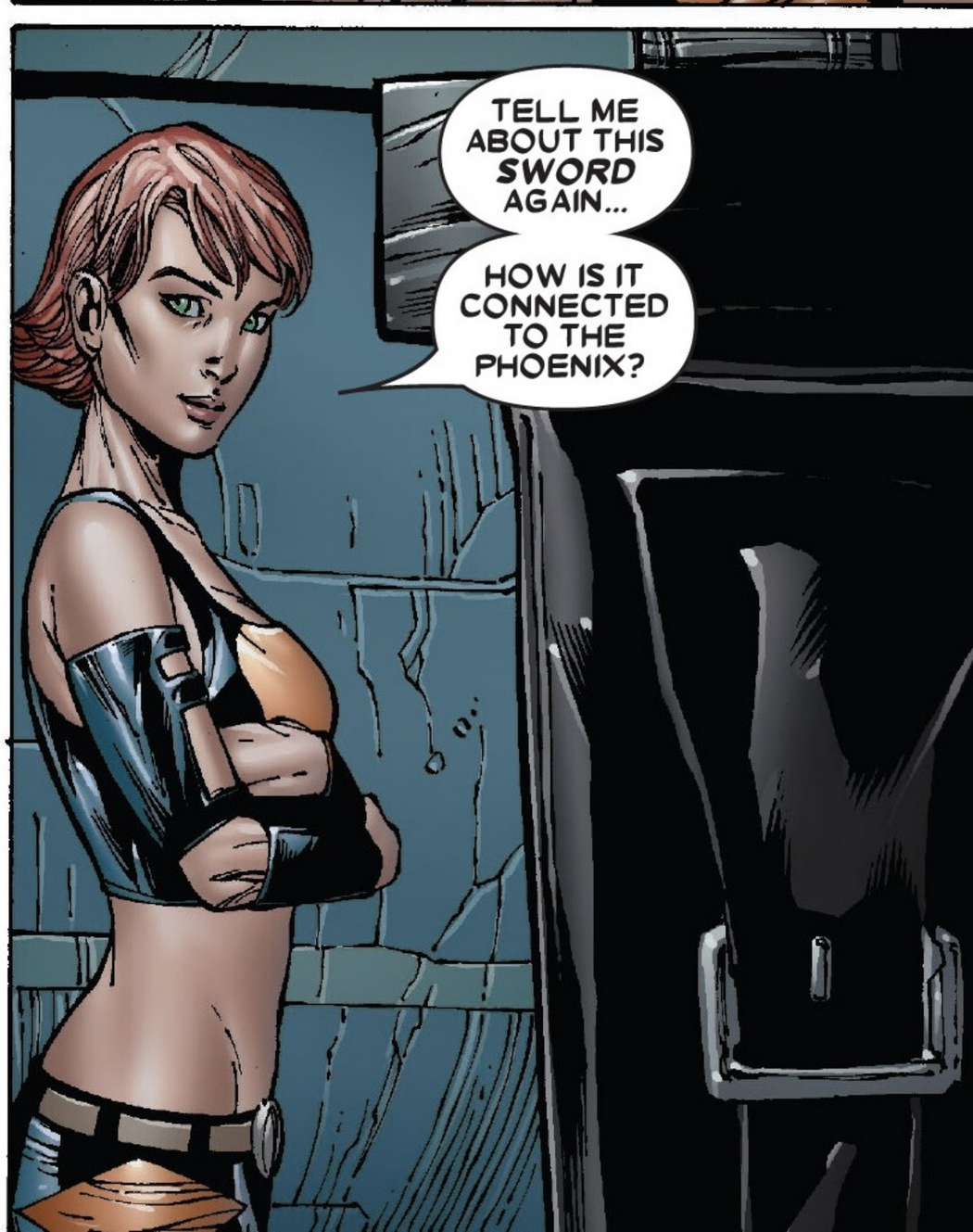
"...AND IT COULD BE *MUCH WORSE* FOR RACHEL."


DAMN IT...
OH HELL...
DAMN THIS, TOO.
FINE THEN...

YOU'RE IN MY HEAD.
WHAT?

OH, WELL... YOU'RE THE *TELEPATH*. CAN'T YOU SHUT IT OFF?
IT'S HAPPENING TO *YOU*, TOO?
SOMETHING IS, YES...EVER SINCE WE *MERGED MINDS* THROUGH THE BLADE OF ROOK'SHIR.

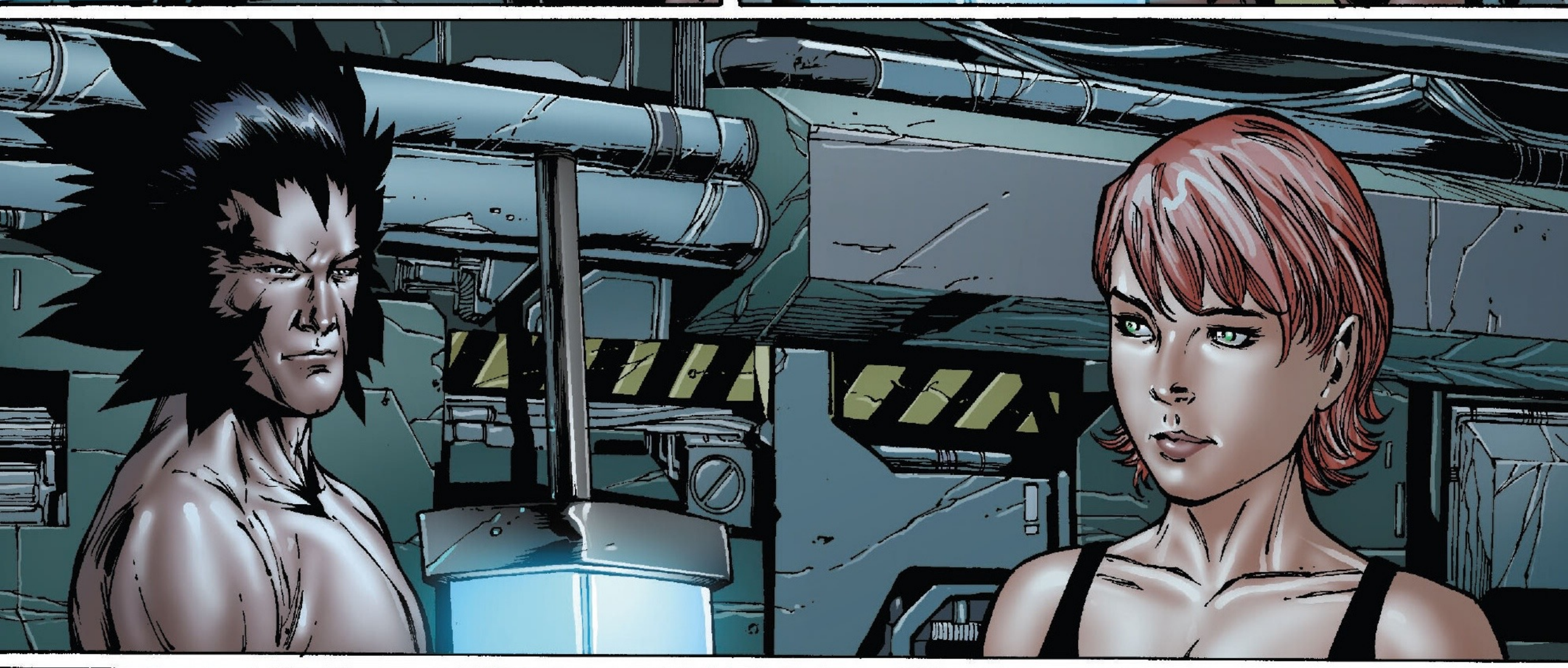
IT'S LIKE I HAVE PIECES OF *YOUR* MEMORIES MIXED WITH *MINE*...


TELL ME ABOUT THIS *SWORD* AGAIN...
HOW IS IT CONNECTED TO THE PHOENIX?

HUNDREDS OF YEARS AGO ROOK'SHIR WAS POSSESSED BY-- WELL, THEY CALLED IT THE *PHAL'KON* THEN...
HE WAS WHERE THE SHI'AR *LEGENDS* OF THE PHOENIX *TRULY* ORIGINATED... THE STORY THEY *KEPT QUIET.*
THEY *KNEW* LONG AGO THAT THE ENERGY COULD JOIN WITH THOSE IT CHOSE...
BUT I THOUGHT JEAN GREY WAS THE FIRST PERSON THE PHOENIX BONDED WITH?
NO, THERE WERE TWO OTHERS, EACH ENDING IN DISASTER... ROOK'SHIR DESTROYED *WORLDS...*
HE HAD THE PHAL'KON IN HIM FOR ONLY *DAYS*, AND HE KILLED SO MANY...
AND SOMEHOW, WHEN THEY FINALLY SLEW HIM, A SMALL *PIECE* OF THE PHOENIX REMAINED WITHIN HIS SWORD...
BUT IT IS NOT THE *TRUE* PHOENIX...
NO, IT'S MORE LIKE A FADED BLUE SHADOW...OR AN *ECHO* OF IT...

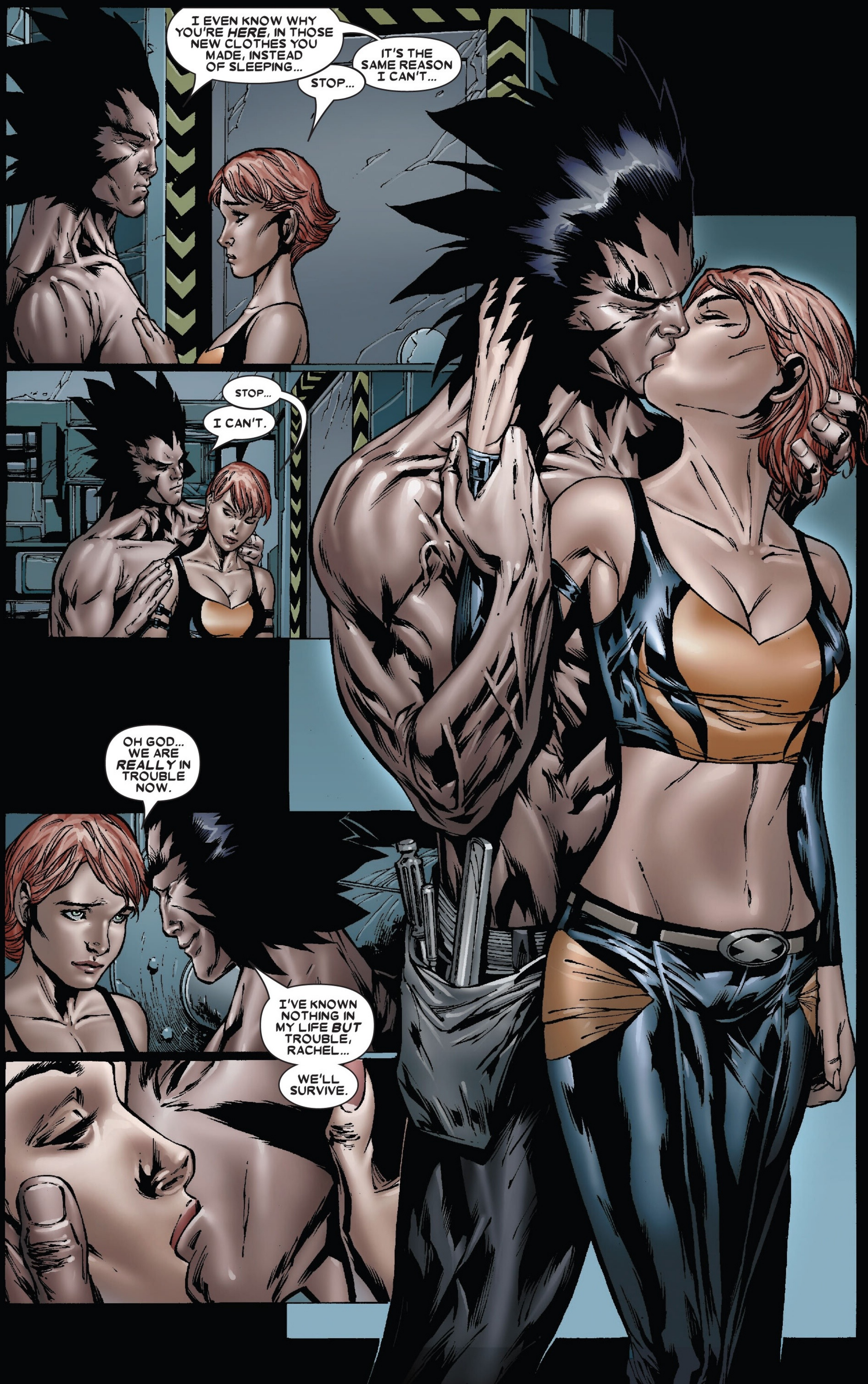
WHICH ISN'T SUCH A BAD THING... IT'S A LOT LESS POWER, BUT IT'S EASIER TO CONTROL.

IT'S TOO EASY... WHEN I FIRST HELD THE BLADE, IT OPENED MY MIND TO THE LIVES OF THOSE WHO CARRIED IT BEFORE ME.
IT TAUGHT ME HOW TO USE IT.
EVEN A SHADOW OF THE PHOENIX WANTS TO BE USED.



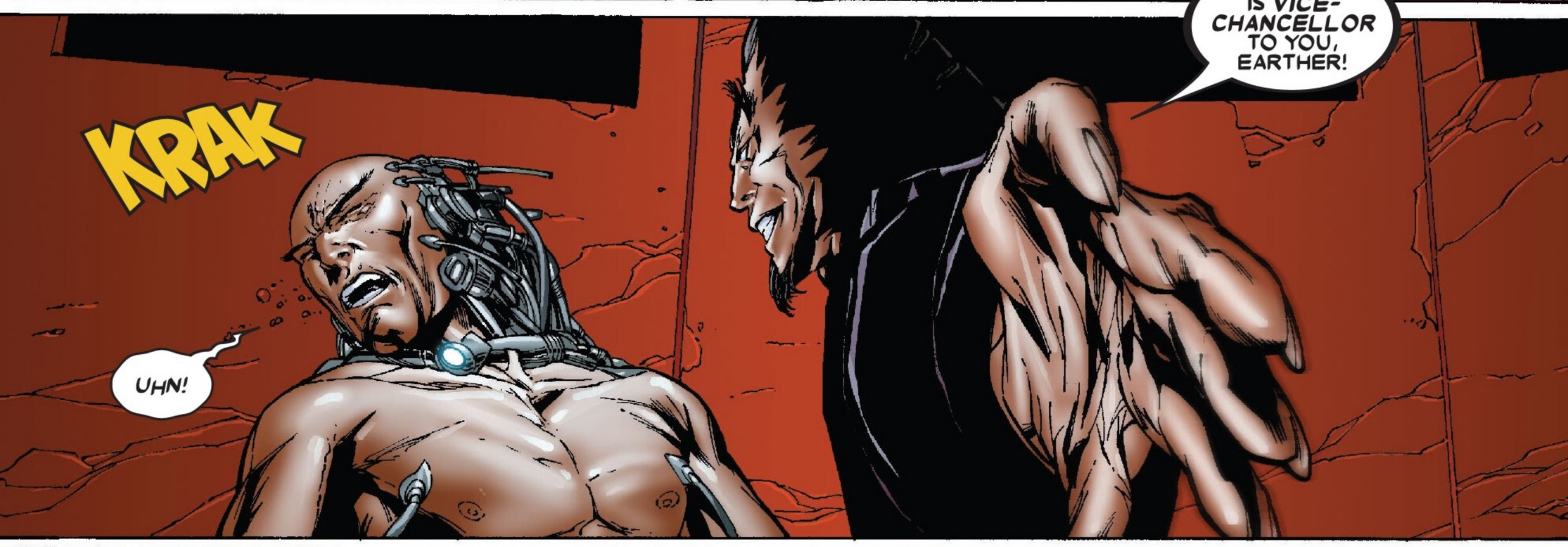
STOP LOOKING AT ME LIKE THAT.
LIKE WHAT?
LIKE YOU KNOW ME.

I DO KNOW YOU.
I SHOULDN'T, BUT I DO.


I EVEN KNOW WHY YOU'RE *HERE*, IN THOSE NEW CLOTHES YOU MADE, INSTEAD OF SLEEPING...
STOP...
IT'S THE SAME REASON I CAN'T...
STOP...
I CAN'T.
OH GOD... WE ARE *REALLY* IN TROUBLE NOW.
I'VE KNOWN NOTHING IN MY LIFE *BUT* TROUBLE, RACHEL...
WE'LL SURVIVE.

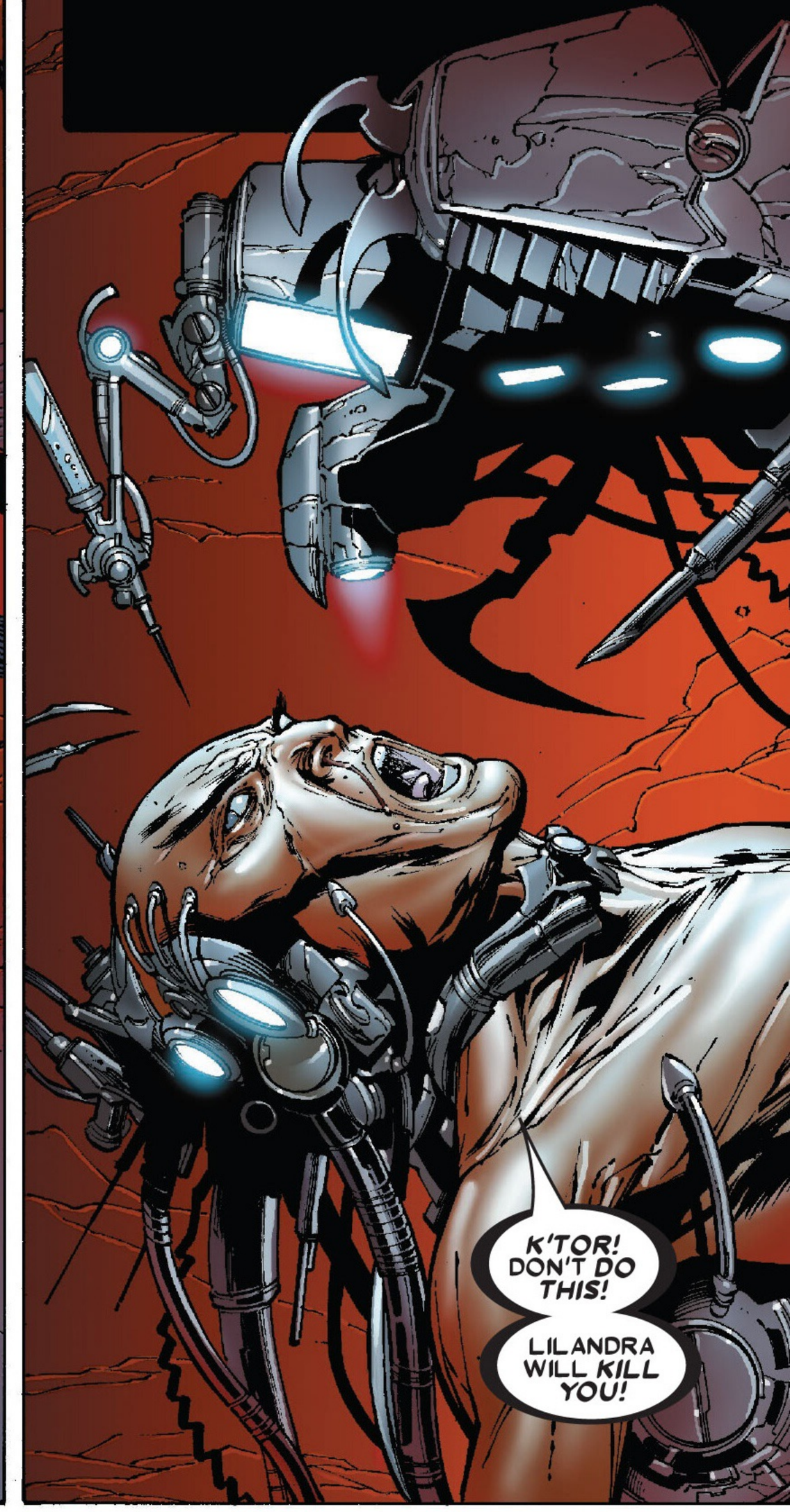
THEY CALL IT THE KISS OF AGONY...ITS TOUCH SEARS RIGHT THROUGH THE BRAIN.

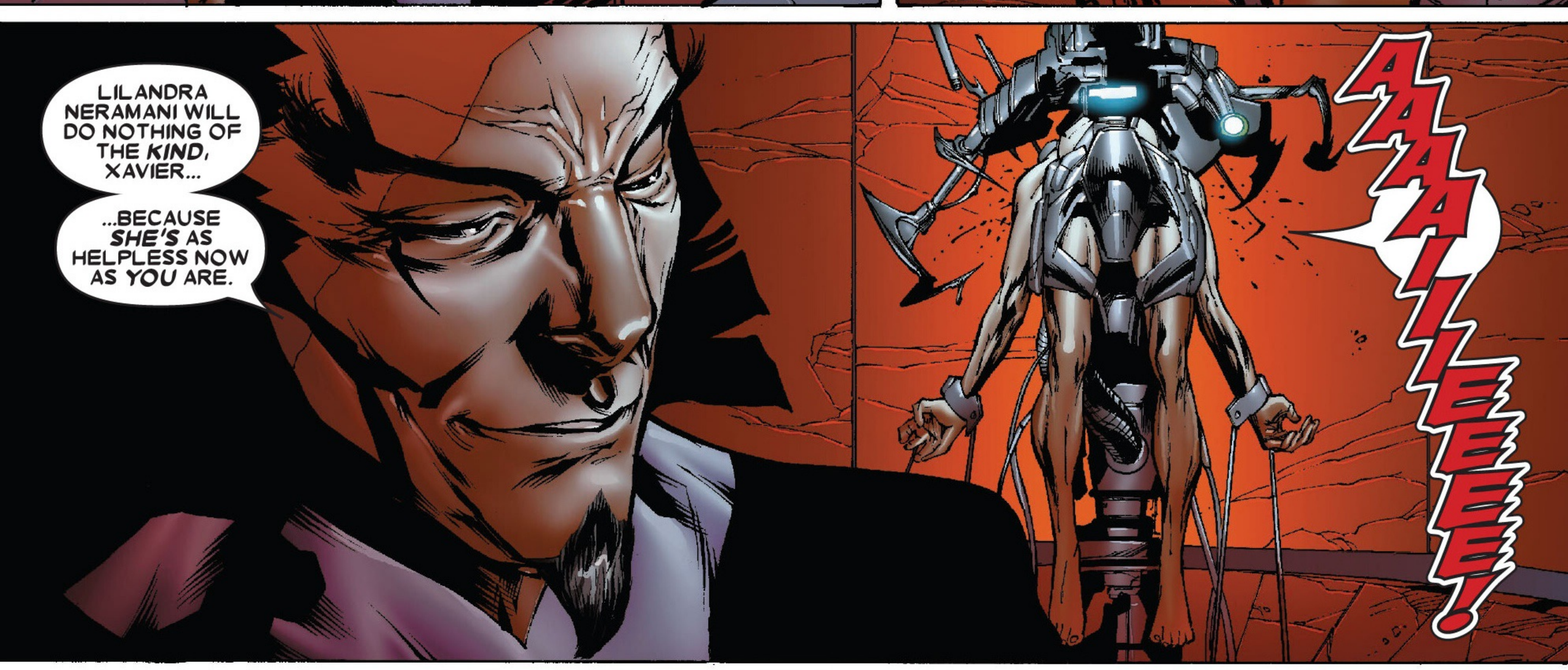
ALTHOUGH I WOULDN'T KNOW, OF COURSE...
IT'S NOT AS IF I'M PLANNING TO TRY THE DEVICE OUT ON MYSELF.
LILANDRA WILL HAVE YOUR FEATHERS FOR THIS, K'TOR.

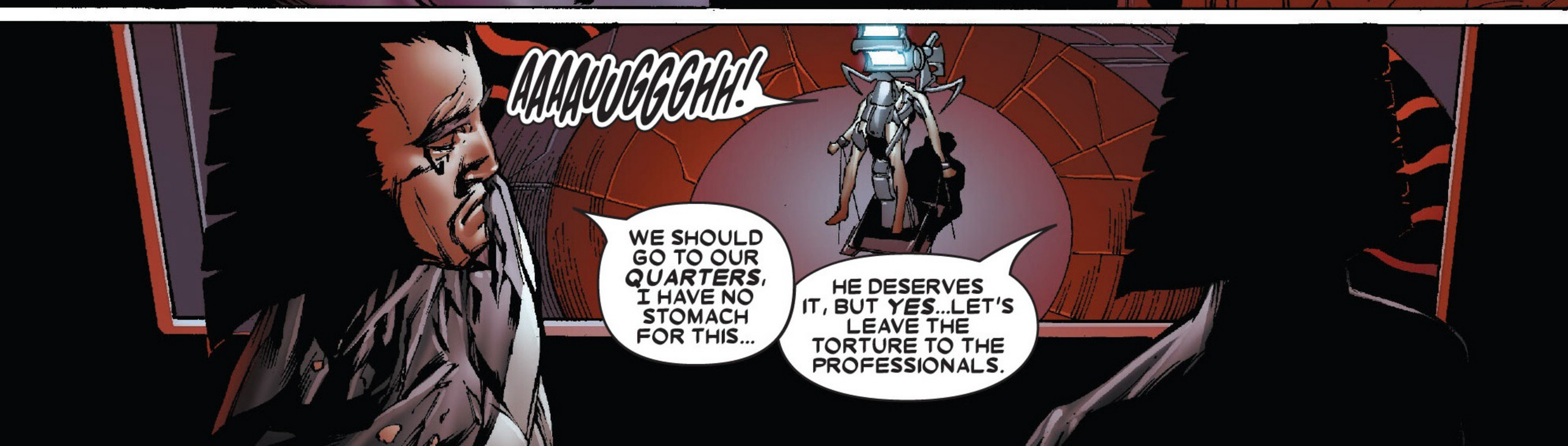

THAT IS VICE-CHANCELLOR TO YOU, EARTHER!
KRAK
UHN!

AND DON'T TRY TO USE YOUR MIND CONTROL... THAT COLLAR INHIBITS THOSE ABILITIES.
I TOLD YOU... I DON'T HAVE THOSE ABILITIES ANYMORE...

YOU'LL *FORGIVE ME* IF I DON'T TAKE YOUR WORD?
IN ANY CASE, YOU CERTAINLY *WON'T* HAVE THEM *SOON*...


K'TOR! DON'T DO *THIS!*
LILANDRA WILL *KILL* YOU!


LILANDRA NERAMANI WILL DO NOTHING OF THE *KIND*, XAVIER...
...BECAUSE *SHE'S* AS HELPLESS NOW AS *YOU* ARE.
AAAIIEEE!


AAAAUUGGGHH!
WE SHOULD GO TO OUR *QUARTERS*, I HAVE NO STOMACH FOR THIS...
HE DESERVES IT, BUT *YES*...LET'S LEAVE THE TORTURE TO THE PROFESSIONALS.

--NEED TO CONTACT MY WIFE. SHE'LL BE *PLEASED* ABOUT OUR REWARD...
PLEASED TO *SPEND IT* FOR YOU.

IT ISN'T LIKE THAT. YOU'RE SIMPLY JEALOUS BECAUSE YOU'VE GOT NO--

CHUDDD

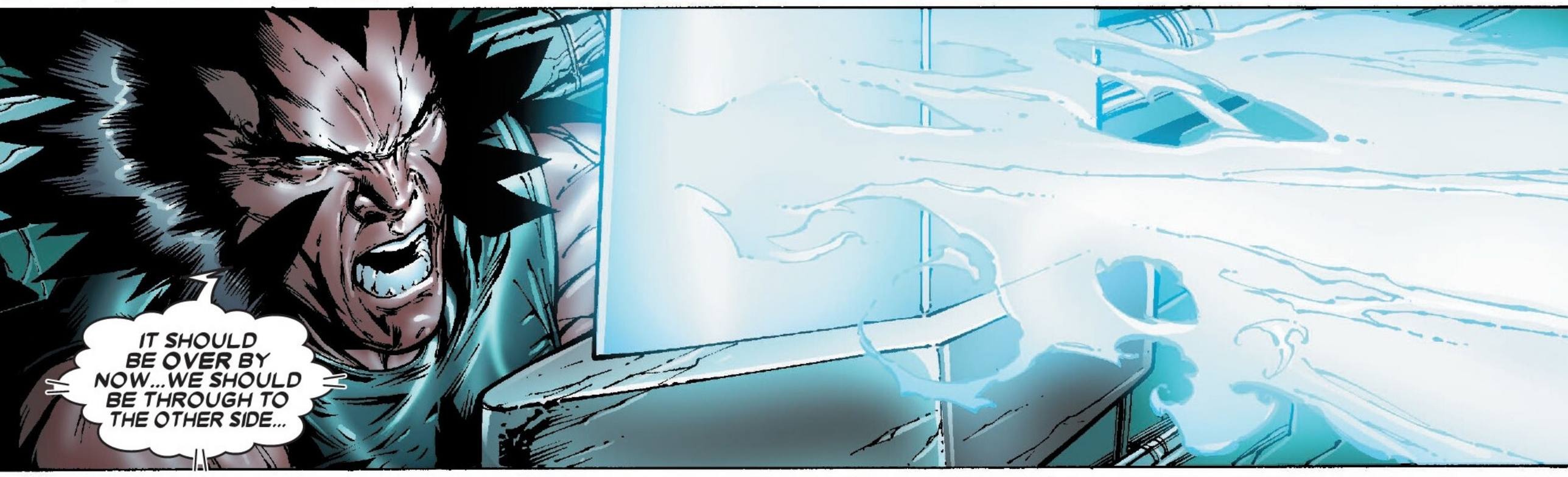
AARRR

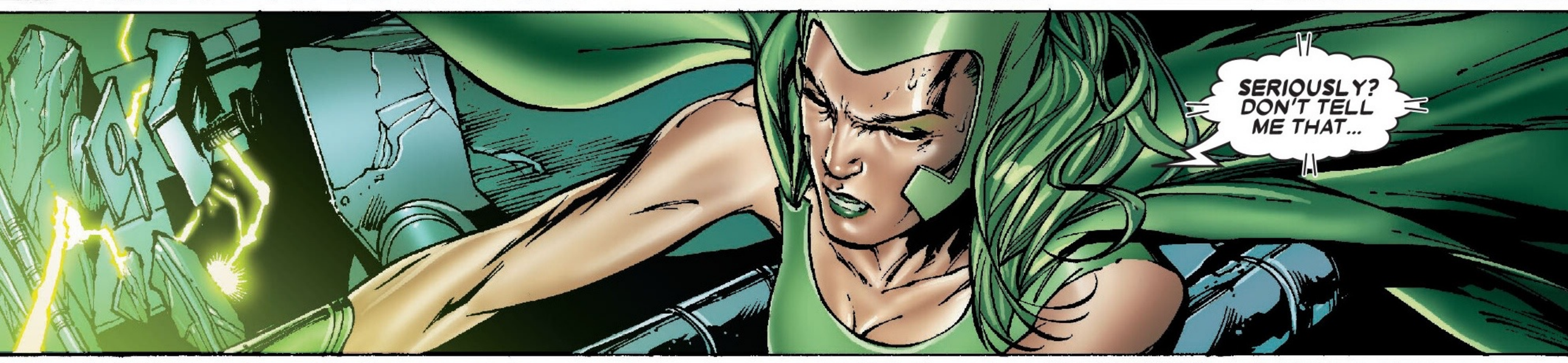
I FIRE THIS BLASTER, AND EVERY GUARD ON THIS SHIP COMES RUNNING, EARTHER FREAK.
I SURVIVED A JUMP THROUGH SPACE HOLDING ONTO THE ROOF OF YOUR SHIP...
...IF YOU THINK THAT BLASTER IS GOING TO HURT ME, YOU'RE DREAMING.
KRAKK
KSSH
WHAT--WHAT DO YOU--WANT FROM ME?
I WANT MY TEACHER...
...AND YOU'RE GOING TO HELP ME SAVE HIM.

UNCANNY X-MEN 482

THE FOLDSPACE--
AN UNDIMENSION WOVEN THROUGH SPACE AND TIME
LORNA DANE-- POLARIS.
DOING ALL SHE CAN TO HOLD TOGETHER HER SHIP'S JUMP ENGINES...
...AND WISHING ONCE AGAIN THAT SHE UNDERSTOOD THE FULL EXTENT OF THE CHANGES APOCALYPSE AND HIS PEOPLE MADE TO HER.
RACHEL? ARE WE STILL LINKED?
YEAH... HOW ARE YOU HOLDING UP, LORNA?
GETTING SHAKY...ENGINE MANIFOLDS REALLY WANT TO BURST OPEN...

YOU CAN DO IT...YOU'RE STRONGER THAN ANYONE I KNOW, LORNA...
I'M TRYING, ALEX...


IT SHOULD BE OVER BY NOW...WE SHOULD BE THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE...


SERIOUSLY? DON'T TELL ME THAT...

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON DOWN THERE, ALEX?
WE'RE DOING OUR BEST...
JUST BE READY TO SEND THE MESSAGE WHEN WE HIT OPEN SPACE...

I DON'T HAVE MUCH LEFT TO GIVE...DID YOU JUST GET US ALL KILLED, KORVUS?
I PRAY I DIDN'T...BUT THE BLADE IS NEARLY DEPLETED, AS WELL...

WAIT... SOMETHING IS...
...HAPPENING...
WE MADE IT...WE'VE MADE THE JUMP...
IS EVERYONE ALL RIGHT DOWN THERE?
HELLO? ALEX?
...WOW... WE DID IT... COOL...
SOMETHING'S WRONG, JAMES. I'M GOING TO CHECK--
WAIT, KURT, SOMEONE'S RESPONDING TO OUR MESSAGE ALREADY...

THIS IS CORSAIR SPEAKING, WHO THE HELL IS THIS?
IDENTIFY OR WE'LL SEND YOUR SHIP INTO THE SUN.
MAJOR SUMMERS, IT'S NIGHTCRAWLER... DID YOU NOT GET OUR SIGNAL?
MY GOD... IT REALLY IS YOU. THOUGHT IT WAS SOME BLOODY SHI'AR TRICK...
AND YOU'VE GOT ALEX WITH YOU?
WE DO, THOUGH HE APPEARS TO BE INCAPACITATED AT THE MOMENT...
DAMN IT ALL TO HELL. WHY ARE YOU HERE NOW...
...WHEN EVERYTHING'S FALLING APART?
THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SHI'AR EMPIRE CHAPTER EIGHT:
IMPERIAL RESCUE

RAZA AND CH'OD SHOULD HAVE YOUR ENGINES OVERHAULED IN A FEW HOURS...

APPARENTLY THEY GOT PRETTY *TORN UP* INSIDE FROM YOUR IMPROVISATIONAL POWER CHARGE.

YOU'RE LUCKY TO HAVE MADE THAT JUMP *AT ALL.*

IT WAS LUCK THAT WE *NEEDED*, CORSAIR, WHICH IS WHY WE RISKED IT.

WELL, SIKORSKY SAYS THAT ALEX AND THE OTHERS ARE *FINE*, THEY JUST NEED REST.

THAT'S GOOD TO HEAR. NOW TELL US WHAT'S HAPPENING...

LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE GETTIN' READY TO GO TO *WAR.*

WE ARE... WORD LEAKED OUT THAT *LILANDRA* HAS BEEN TAKEN *CAPTIVE* BY CHANCELLOR ARAKI.

IT'S A *COUP*.

MEIN GOTT... THEN WE ARE TOO LATE.

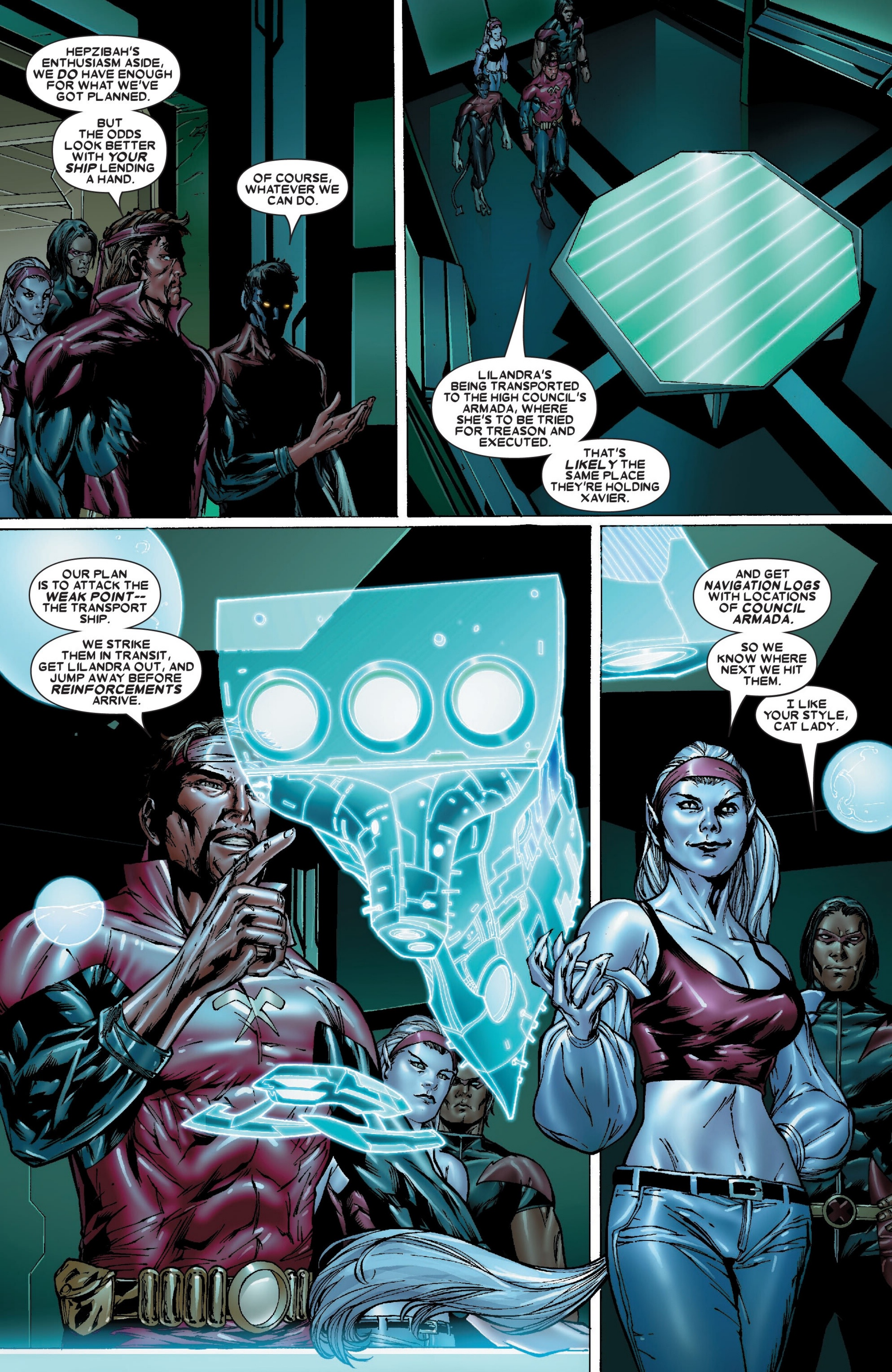
NOT *YET* WE AREN'T. RUMOR HAS IT THAT *DEATHBIRD* IS BACK.

AND I REFUSE TO LET HER TAKE LILANDRA DOWN AND TURN THIS EMPIRE BACK INTO A NIGHTMARE.

SO, WHAT'S THE PLAN?

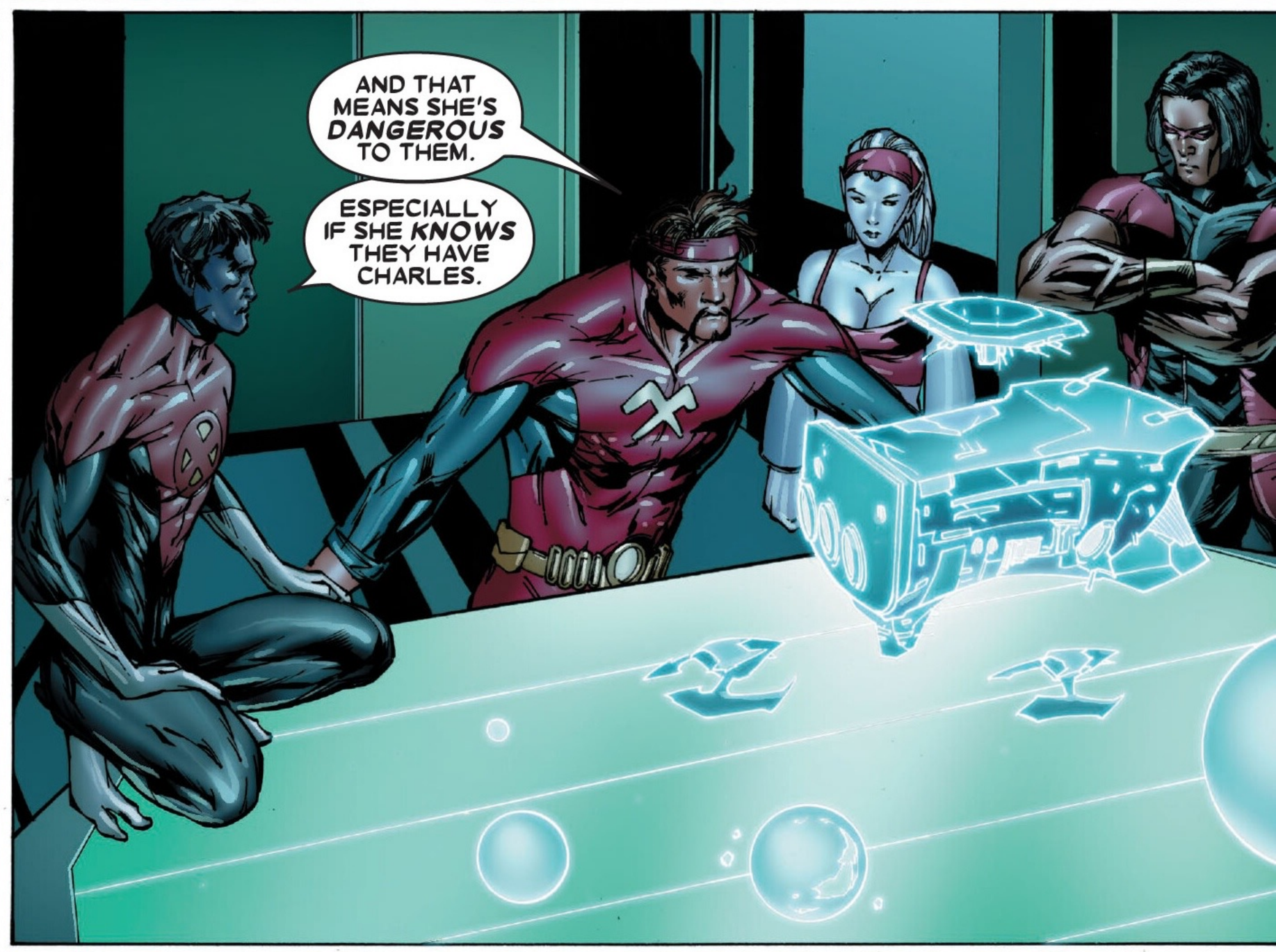
WE GOING TO BLOW LITTLE *BIRDIES* RIGHT OUT OF THE STARS.

YOU GUYS GOT THAT KIND OF FIREPOWER?


HEPZIBAH'S ENTHUSIASM ASIDE, WE DO HAVE ENOUGH FOR WHAT WE'VE GOT PLANNED.
BUT THE ODDS LOOK BETTER WITH YOUR SHIP LENDING A HAND.
OF COURSE, WHATEVER WE CAN DO.
LILANDRA'S BEING TRANSPORTED TO THE HIGH COUNCIL'S ARMADA, WHERE SHE'S TO BE TRIED FOR TREASON AND EXECUTED.
THAT'S LIKELY THE SAME PLACE THEY'RE HOLDING XAVIER.
OUR PLAN IS TO ATTACK THE WEAK POINT-- THE TRANSPORT SHIP.
WE STRIKE THEM IN TRANSIT, GET LILANDRA OUT, AND JUMP AWAY BEFORE REINFORCEMENTS ARRIVE.
AND GET NAVIGATION LOGS WITH LOCATIONS OF COUNCIL ARMADA.
SO WE KNOW WHERE NEXT WE HIT THEM.
I LIKE YOUR STYLE, CAT LADY.

AND THAT WILL GIVE US OUR BEST CHANCE OF RESCUING THE PROFESSOR AND DARWIN, TRACKING THE IMPERIAL COUNCIL.
IT *WILL*, KURT...AND LILANDRA WILL BE THE *KEY* TO SAVING THEM.

SHE *HASN'T* BEEN HERSELF SINCE THEIR MARRIAGE WAS ANNULLED, BUT IF THE COUNCIL MADE A MOVE ON HER...
...IT MUST MEAN THAT THEY CAN'T *CONTROL HER* ANYMORE.


AND THAT MEANS SHE'S *DANGEROUS* TO THEM.
ESPECIALLY IF SHE *KNOWS* THEY HAVE CHARLES.

YES...BUT WHY WOULD HE RISK *COMING BACK?* I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT.
HE KNEW IT MEANT *DEATH* IF HE WAS CAPTURED.
THIS IS SOMETHING WE MUST WAIT TO DISCUSS UNTIL--
DAD...

ALEX! YOU SHOULDN'T BE OUT OF *SICK BAY* YET.
NO, DAD... WE HAVE TO TALK...IN *PRIVATE.*

SHI'AR HIGH COUNCIL STAR CARRIER
TO THINK THIS EARTHER WAS ONCE SOMEONE TO FEAR...THIS BALD FOOL...
TO THINK HE MATED WITH AN EMPRESS...
HOW THE MIGHTY DO FALL.
DO YOU HAVE DUTY TONIGHT?
YES, SECURITY DETAIL FOR THE CHANCELLOR'S SPEECH...
I'M ON THAT DETAIL, AS WELL...

THEY'RE BEING VERY MYSTERIOUS ABOUT ALL OF IT, THOUGH.

I KNOW...AS IF WE HAVEN'T ALL HEARD THE *RUMORS* BY NOW...

ZZZTTZZ

OW.

LET'S TRY THAT AGAIN...

PROFESSOR? ARE YOU *OKAY?*

...WHO... I DIDN'T... I DON'T...

DAMN IT... WHAT HAVE THEY *DONE* TO YOU?

AND HOW THE HELL DO WE GET YOU *OUT* OF THIS?

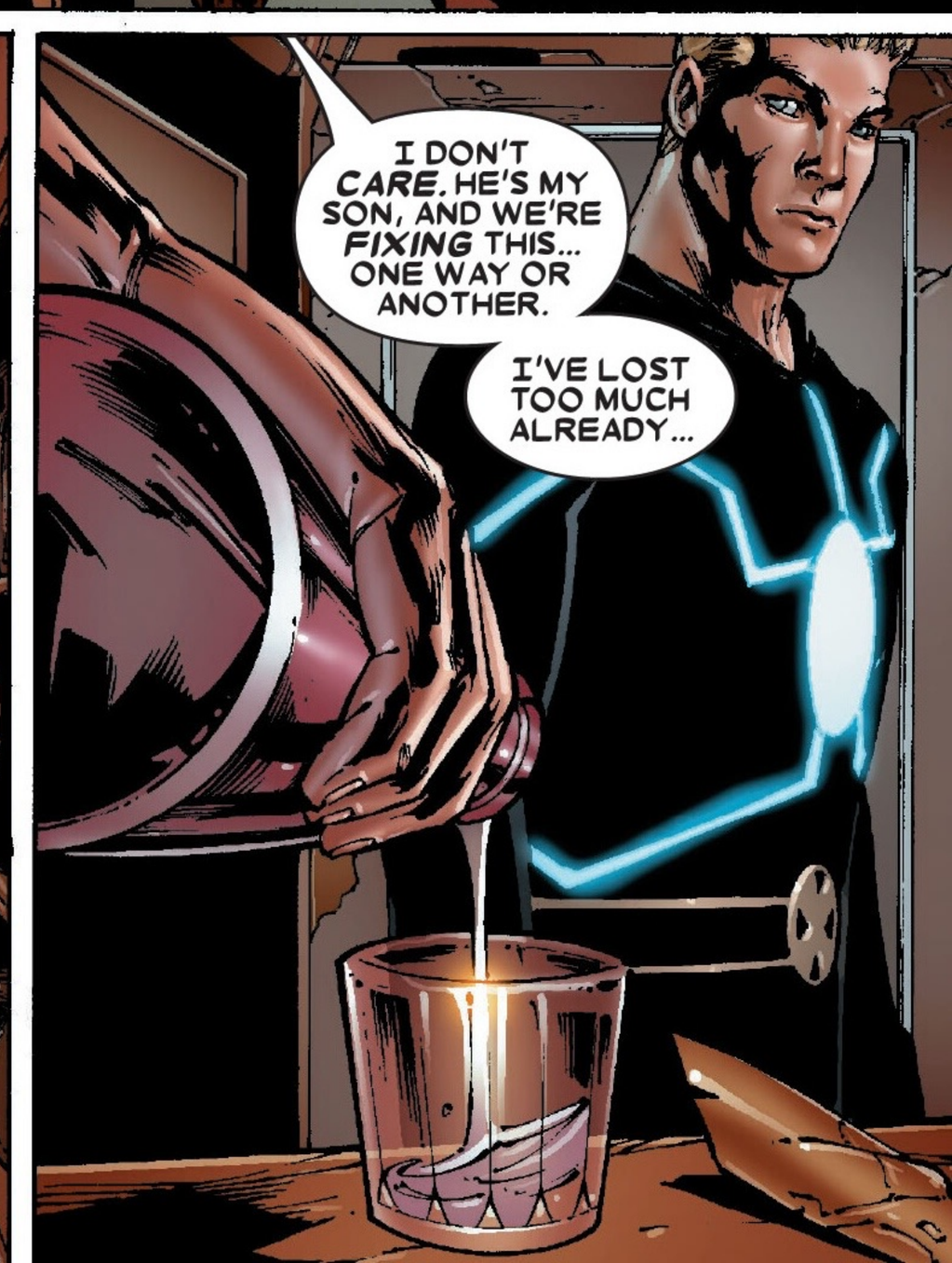
MY GOD...IT CAN'T BE TRUE. I SAW *D'KEN* KILL HIM...
I KNOW... BUT IT IS.
YOU HAVE A *THIRD SON*, AND HE'S LOST HIS MIND...IF HE *WASN'T* CRAZY TO BEGIN WITH.

AND WITH EVERYTHING THE SHI'AR DID TO HIM, I WOULDN'T BE SURPRISED EITHER WAY.

DAMN D'KEN, I HOPE WHATEVER *CATATONIC* STATE HE'S LOCKED IN IS A LIVING HELL... IF HE *WERE* STILL WALKING AROUND... I'D...GOD...
I JUST--I THOUGHT I'D LOST *EVERYTHING* THAT DAY, THOUGHT YOU WERE *ALL* DEAD...
...AND THE *BABY*...I THOUGHT...

I KNOW, DAD.

WE HAVE TO FIND HIM.
WE HAVE TO FIX IT.
WE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO. HE'S KILLED PEOPLE. A *LOT* OF THEM.
ON EARTH, *AND* IN SHI'AR SPACE.


I DON'T *CARE*. HE'S MY SON, AND WE'RE *FIXING* THIS... ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.
I'VE LOST TOO MUCH ALREADY...

COUNCIL STARWAYS–
PUBLIC ACCESS RESTRICTED

I REQUESTED THIS MISSION, YOUR MAJESTY...I WANTED TO BE THE ONE TO DELIVER YOU TO JUSTICE.

DO YOU KNOW WHY?

BECAUSE YOU'RE A COWARD AND A TRAITOR?

HOW DARE YOU--

CAPTAIN!

THE CHANCELLOR'S ORDERS WERE EXPLICIT--NO ONE LAYS A HAND ON THE EMPRESS.

HOW DARE YOU QUESTION ANY SHI'AR'S LOYALTY...

MY WIFE DIED BECAUSE OF YOUR BETRAYAL...

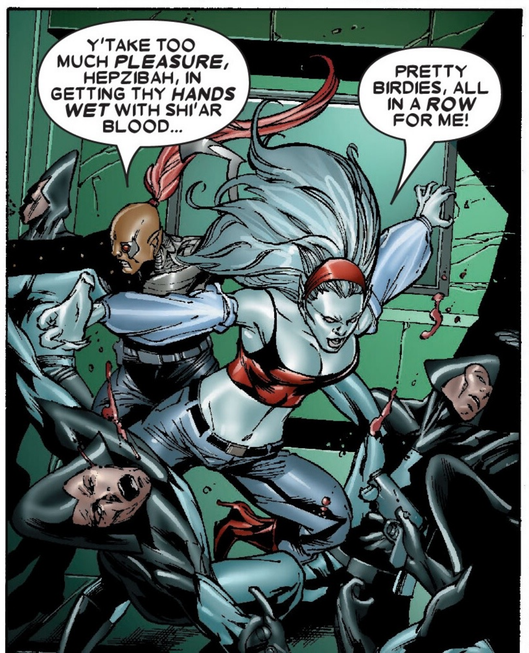
CAPTAIN! ALERT CODE ALPHA!

WHAT? WHAT IS IT?!

WE HAVE MULTIPLE SHIPS JUMPING INTO ATTACK POSITIONS!
THAT'S--THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!
OUR ROUTE WAS AN IMPERIAL SECRET!
YES, CAPTAIN-- IT WAS.
KRAK
HULL BREACH ON LEVEL TWO! WE'RE BEING BOARDED!
CAPTAIN-- DO YOU HEAR ME?!
FORGIVE ME, EMPRESS LILANDRA...BUT WE MUST HURRY...
YOU ARE...?
A FRIEND... WHO KNEW HOW TO SEND WORD TO OTHERS...
OTHERS? YOU CANNOT MEAN THE --

STARJAMMERS!

KILL THEM! BURN THEIR EYES OUT!



"OKAY, ARE WE *CLEAR* ON THIS?"

IF ANYONE STOPS US, YOU'RE A *GUARD* ESCORTING US TO A SHIP IN THE HANGAR.

WE'RE BEING SENT WHEREVER YOU PEOPLE PUT PRISONERS YOU'VE FINISHED TORTURING...

GUUHHH... FTT...

NO-NO... YOU'LL GET US ALL *KILLED.*

THAT IS A *RISK*... BUT THIS IS THE BEST CHANCE I'M GOING TO GET.

THERE'S A HIGH COUNCIL *EVENT* ON THE PROMENADE, AND ALMOST EVERYONE IS THERE...WE CAN WALK RIGHT PAST WITHOUT DRAWING ATTENTION.

YOU GET US ONTO A *SHIP*, AND WE GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE...

...AND YOU CAN GO BACK TO BEING A *CHAK'BALAAR* WHO I SHOULDN'T HAVE SAVED IN THE FIRST PLACE.

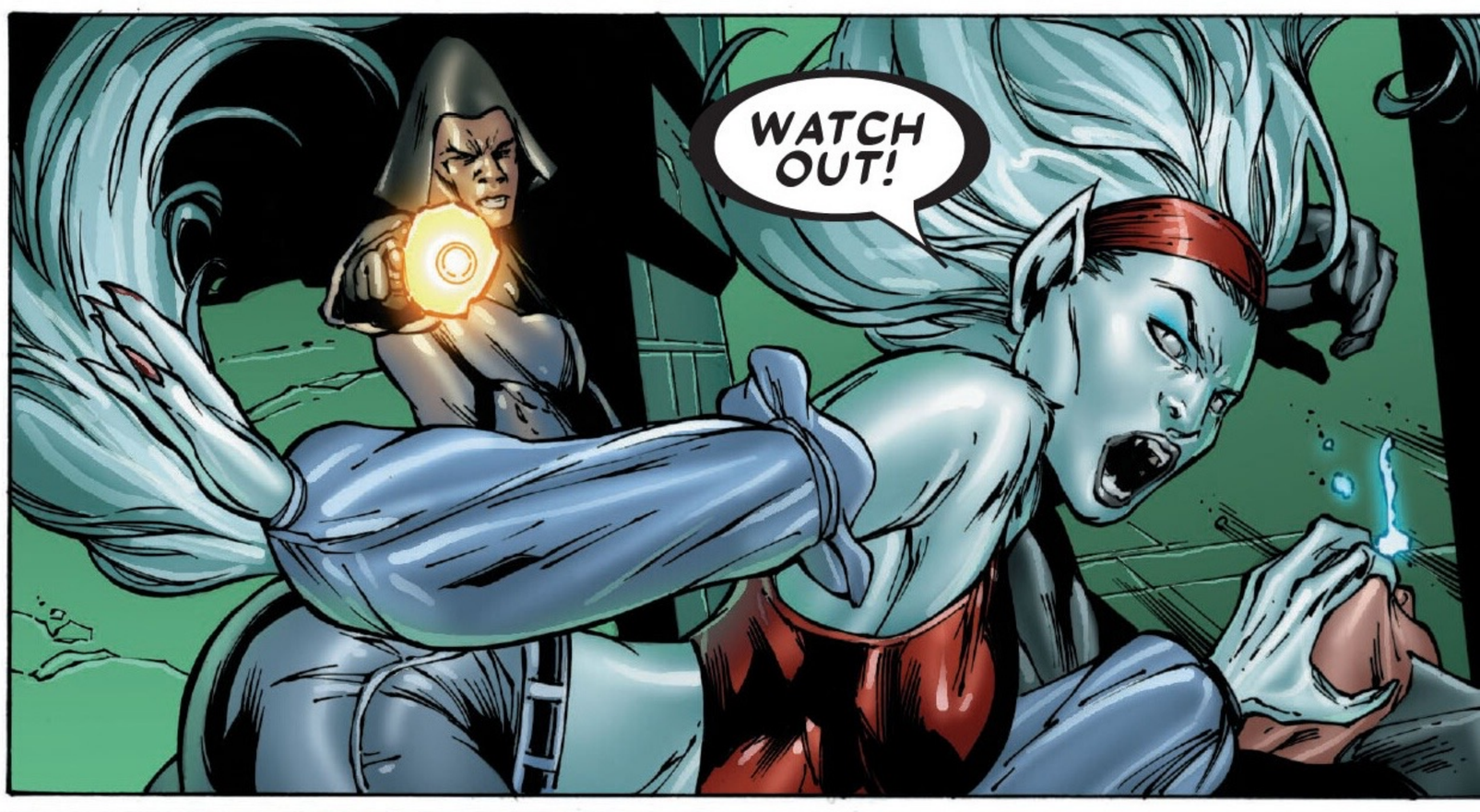
AND REMEMBER THAT BLASTER WON'T DO *ANYTHING* BUT MAKE ME ANGRY...

...SO IF YOU WANT TO SURVIVE THIS, YOU'D BETTER BE *CONVINCING.*

YOUR BLADE IS SOMETHING TO BEHOLD...HOW HEAVY CAN IT *BE?*

FOR ANY HAND BUT MINE, IT WOULD BE EASIER TO LIFT A *STAR*, RAZA...

BUT TO ME IT HAS NO *WEIGHT* AT ALL.



RAY, YOU OKAY?
HE'S HURT... KORVUS JUST GOT HURT...
BUT HE'LL BE ALL RIGHT. IT WAS MINOR.
WHAT IS GOING ON WITH YOU TWO?
I DON'T KNOW...
HE'S IN MY HEAD... A LOT.
HE'S GOT THAT WHOLE DARK TORTURED SOUL THING GOING ON...
HE A GOOD KISSER?
SERIOUSLY.
RACHEL! YOU'VE KNOWN HIM TWO DAYS!
WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME? I SAID HE WAS IN MY HEAD!
CONCENTRATE ON THE MISSION, LADIES.
TODAY IS ABOUT FIGHTING, NOT KISSING.

--TODAY IS ABOUT *HOMECOMING!* THE *RETURN* OF THE IMPERIUM TO WHAT IT ONCE WAS --

--AND WHAT IT SHOULD ALWAYS HAVE BEEN!

NO...

...THAT'S NOT POSSIBLE...

BAMF
BAMF
BAMF

IT'S CLEAR NOW, RAY...OPEN THE DOOR.

GOT IT...

KKRREEEEEEE

KURT? RACHEL?

YOU'RE WITH THE *STARJAMMERS?*

WE HAD TO HELP THEM *SAVE YOU,* DID WE NOT, MY LADY?

IS *CHARLES* WITH YOU?

I HAVE *MUCH* TO APOLOGIZE TO HIM FOR...

THEY-- THEY'VE *GOT HIM,* EMPRESS...

YES, I'M AFRAID DEATHBIRD HAS *CHARLES XAVIER* IN HER CLAWS, JUST AS SHE HAD YOU...

DEATHBIRD? NO...

YOU'VE GOT IT WRONG... IT'S *MUCH WORSE* THAN MY SISTER...

--SO I GIVE YOU THE TRIUMPHANT REAWAKENING OF THE TRUE RULER OF THE IMPERIUM...
...THE GREAT D'KEN!

WHAT THE HELL IS VULCAN DOING WITH D'KEN?
AND WHY ISN'T D'KEN IN A COMA?
HELP! HELP ME!
GUARDS!

INTRUDER ONBOARD!
HELP!

OH &#@%...

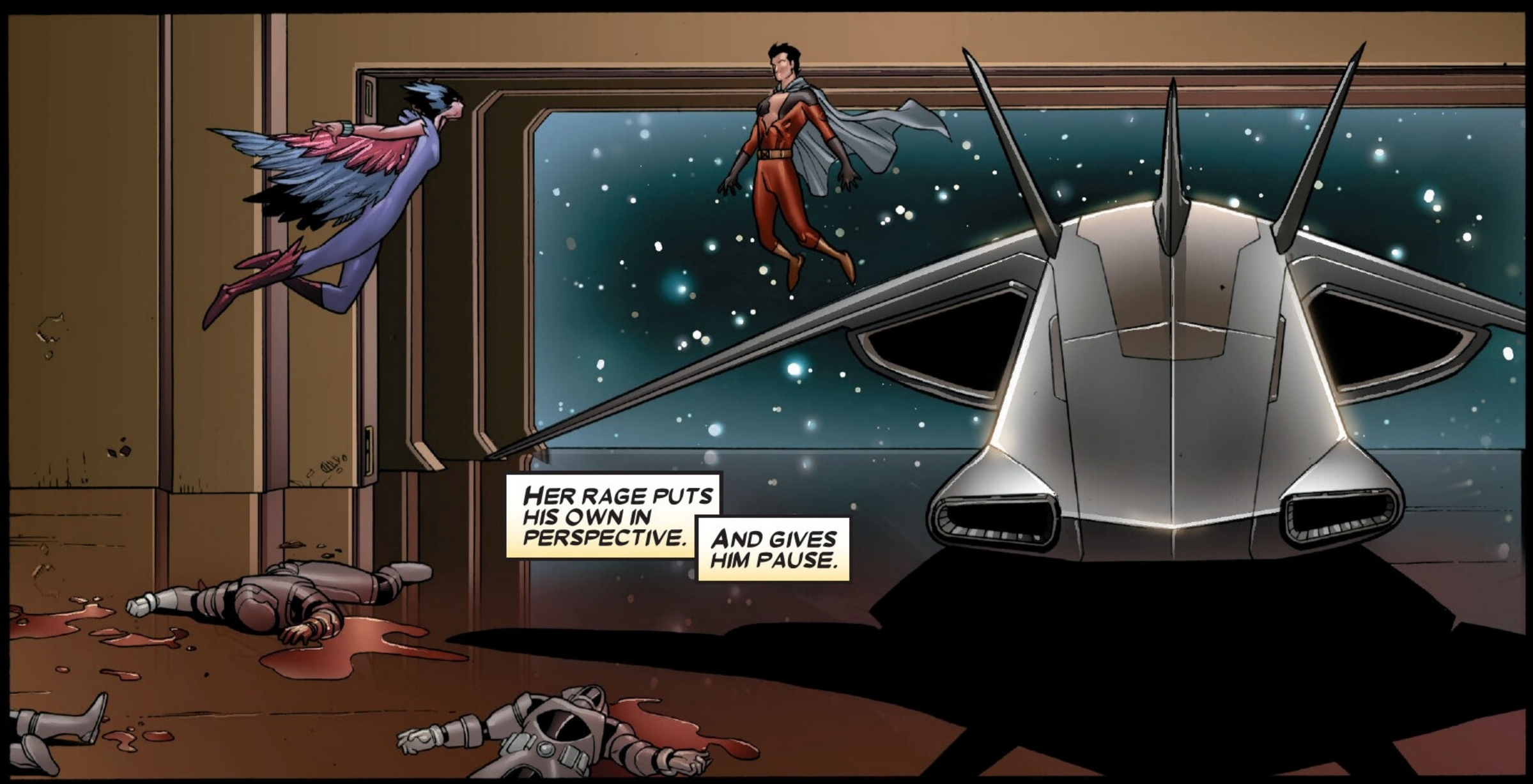
UNCANNY X-MEN 483

HE LISTENS AS "THE GREAT" D'KEN SPEAKS AND HIS PEOPLE CHEER HIS RETURN...
THEIR ROAR IS DEAFENING.
HE STANDS ALONGSIDE DEATHBIRD, WATCHING THE TRUE EMPEROR'S RETURN TO GLORY...
...AND THINKS THAT ONLY DAYS AGO, HE WANTED TO KILL THIS MAN WITH HIS OWN HANDS.
BUT SO MANY THINGS IN HIS LIFE HAVE CHANGED...

...IN THE WEEKS SINCE HE AND DEATHBIRD ESCAPED FROM THE PRISON MOON...
WATCH OUT!
THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SHI'AR EMPIRE CHAPTER NINE:
VULCAN'S DESCENT

...WHERE HE THOUGHT HE WOULD LOSE HIS MIND.
WE NEED THAT JUMPSHIP!
WORRY ABOUT YOURSELF, WOMAN!
THEY WORK WELL TOGETHER, ALMOST INSTINCTIVELY...
AND HE ADMIRES HER RUTHLESSNESS IMMEDIATELY.
THESE WERE ONCE HER PEOPLE, HE KNOWS...

...BUT SHE MAKES THEM PAY FOR KEEPING HER PRISONER...
...WHETHER THEY WERE AWARE OF IT OR NOT.


HER RAGE PUTS HIS OWN IN PERSPECTIVE.
AND GIVES HIM PAUSE.

BUT HE'S GLAD IT WAS ARRANGED THAT THEY SHOULD MEET...

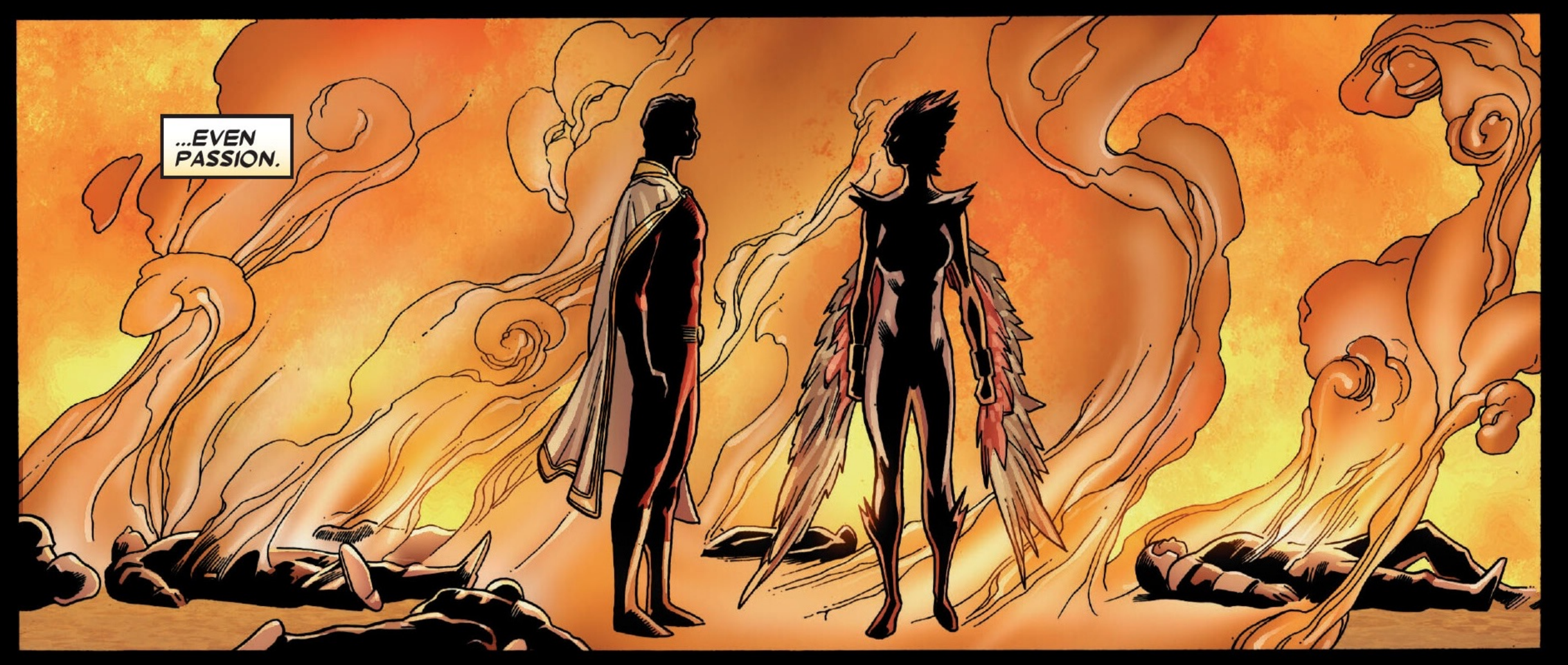
...THOUGH HE STILL DOESN'T UNDERSTAND WHY, OR WHO IT WAS THAT ARRANGED IT.

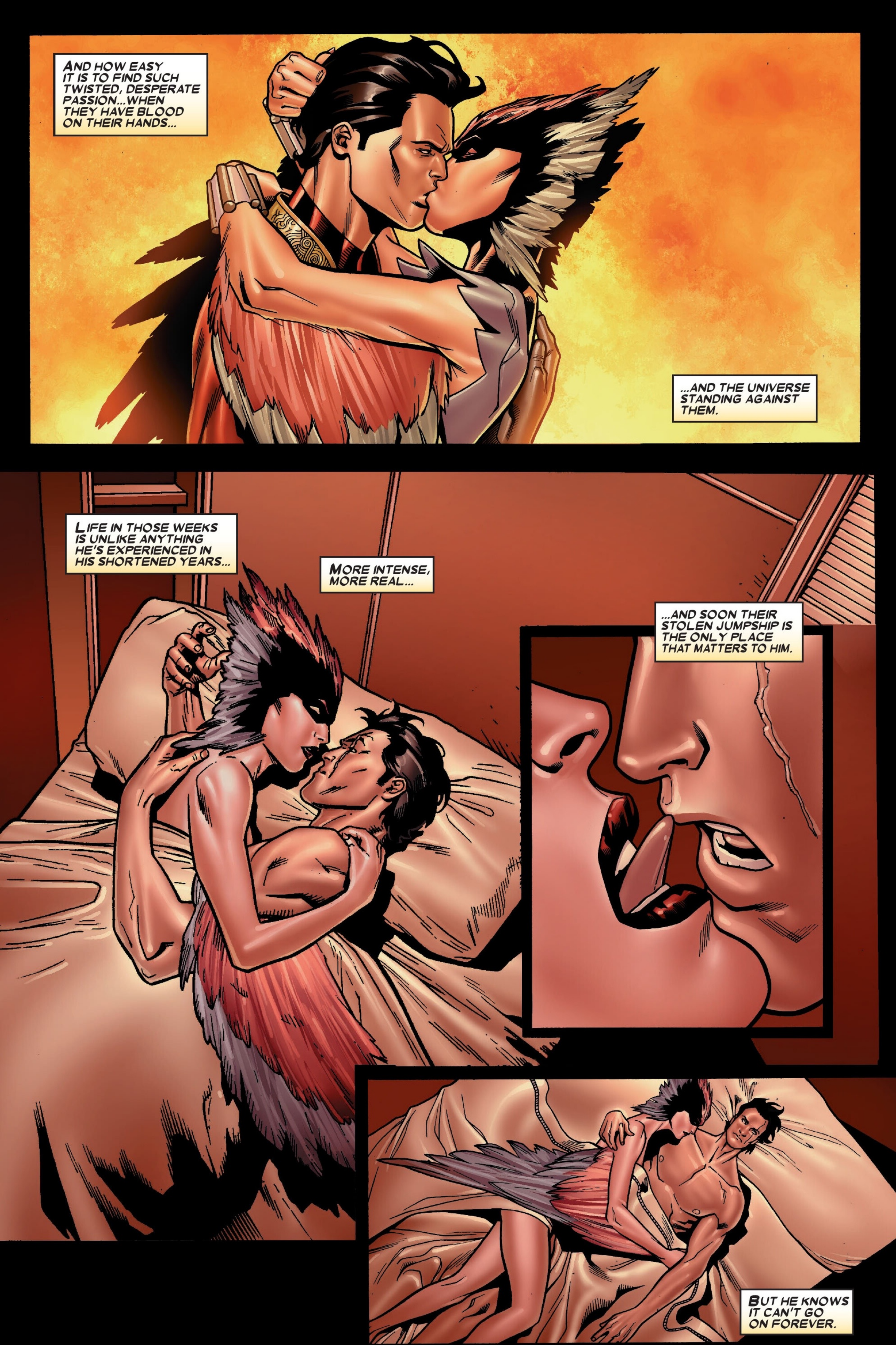
WHO ARE THE *SECRET ORDER?*

AND WHY WAS ONE OF THEM WILLING TO DIE SO I WOULD SET YOU FREE?

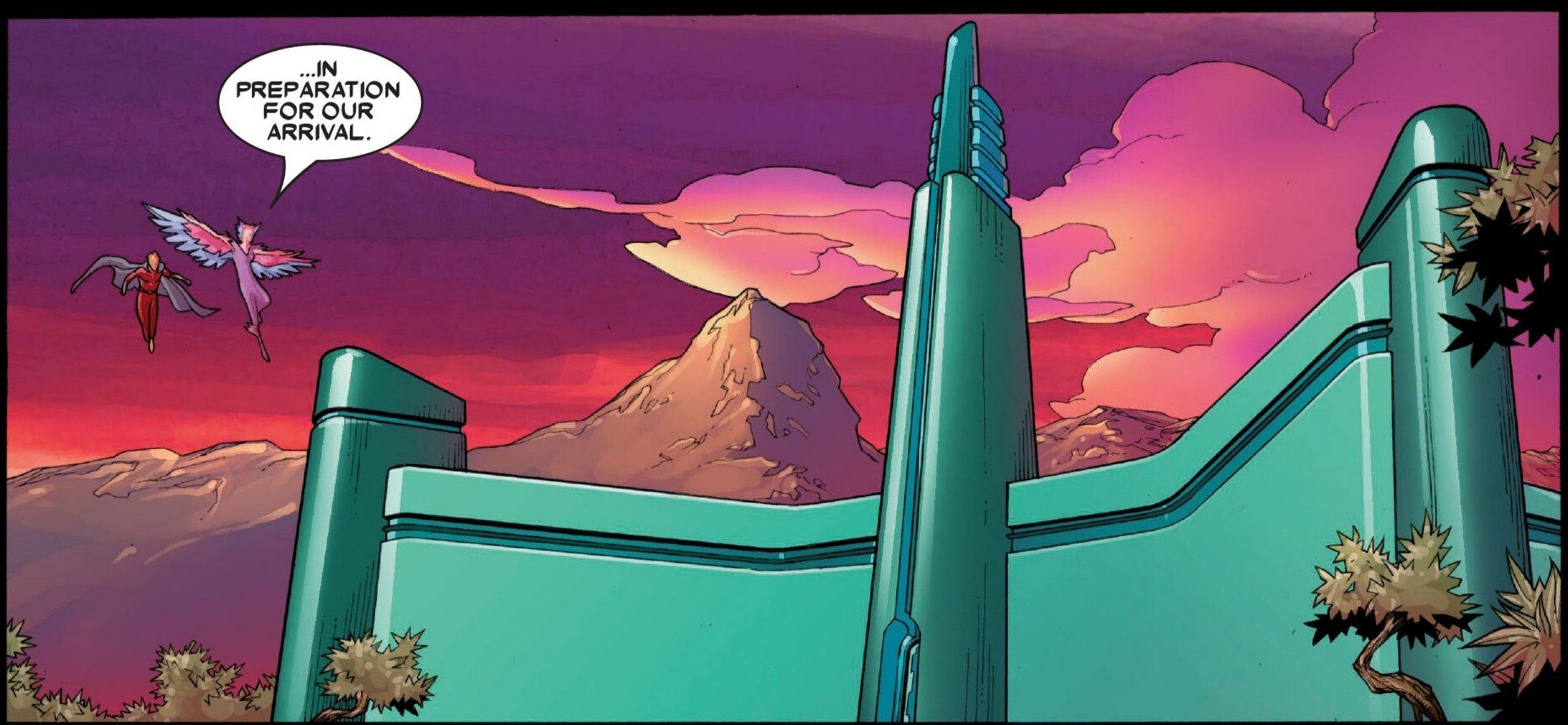
LET US TAKE THIS SLOW, EARTHER...

IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOW THOSE WORDS, VULCAN REALIZES WHAT HE'S FOUND IN DEATHBIRD...
...A KINDRED SPIRIT.
SHE KEEPS HER SECRETS FROM HIM, YES...
...BUT SHE SHARES OTHER THINGS.
EXHILARATION...
...DESTRUCTION...


...EVEN PASSION.


And how easy it is to find such twisted, desperate passion...when they have blood on their hands...
...and the universe standing against them.
Life in those weeks is unlike anything he's experienced in his shortened years...
More intense, more real...
...and soon their stolen jumpship is the only place that matters to him.
But he knows it can't go on forever.

WHERE ARE WE? THIS DOESN'T SEEM SAFE.
IT SHOULD BE SAFE ENOUGH FOR NOW, MY LOVE.
MY PEOPLE HAVE SENT MOST OF THE SOLDIERS AWAY...


...IN PREPARATION FOR OUR ARRIVAL.

YOUR MAJESTY...
YOU CANNOT KNOW HOW GLAD THESE EYES ARE TO SEE YOU.

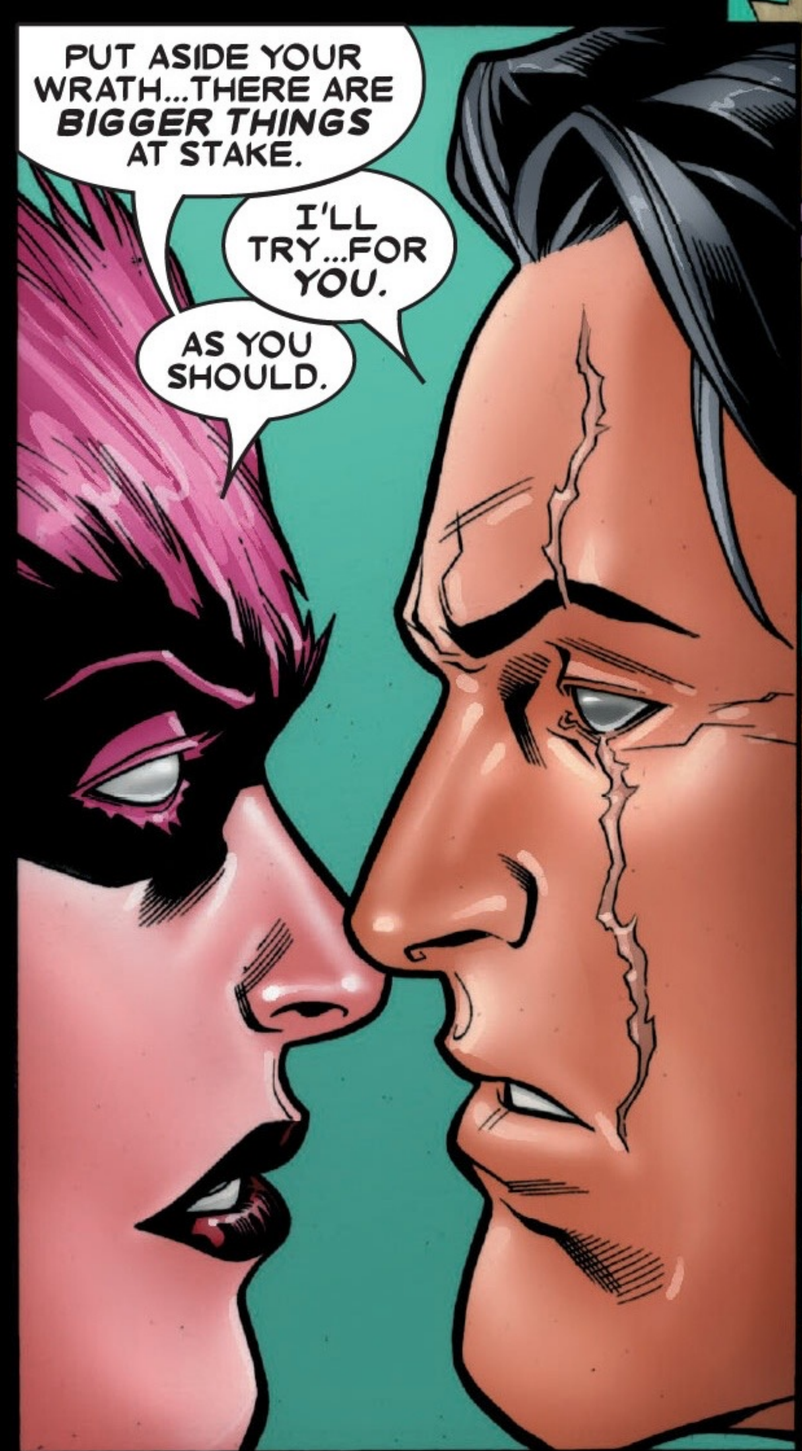
ENOUGH, ARAKI...WERE K'TOR'S MESSAGES TRUE?
HAS MY BROTHER RECOVERED?
WHAT?!

HEY! BACK OFF --

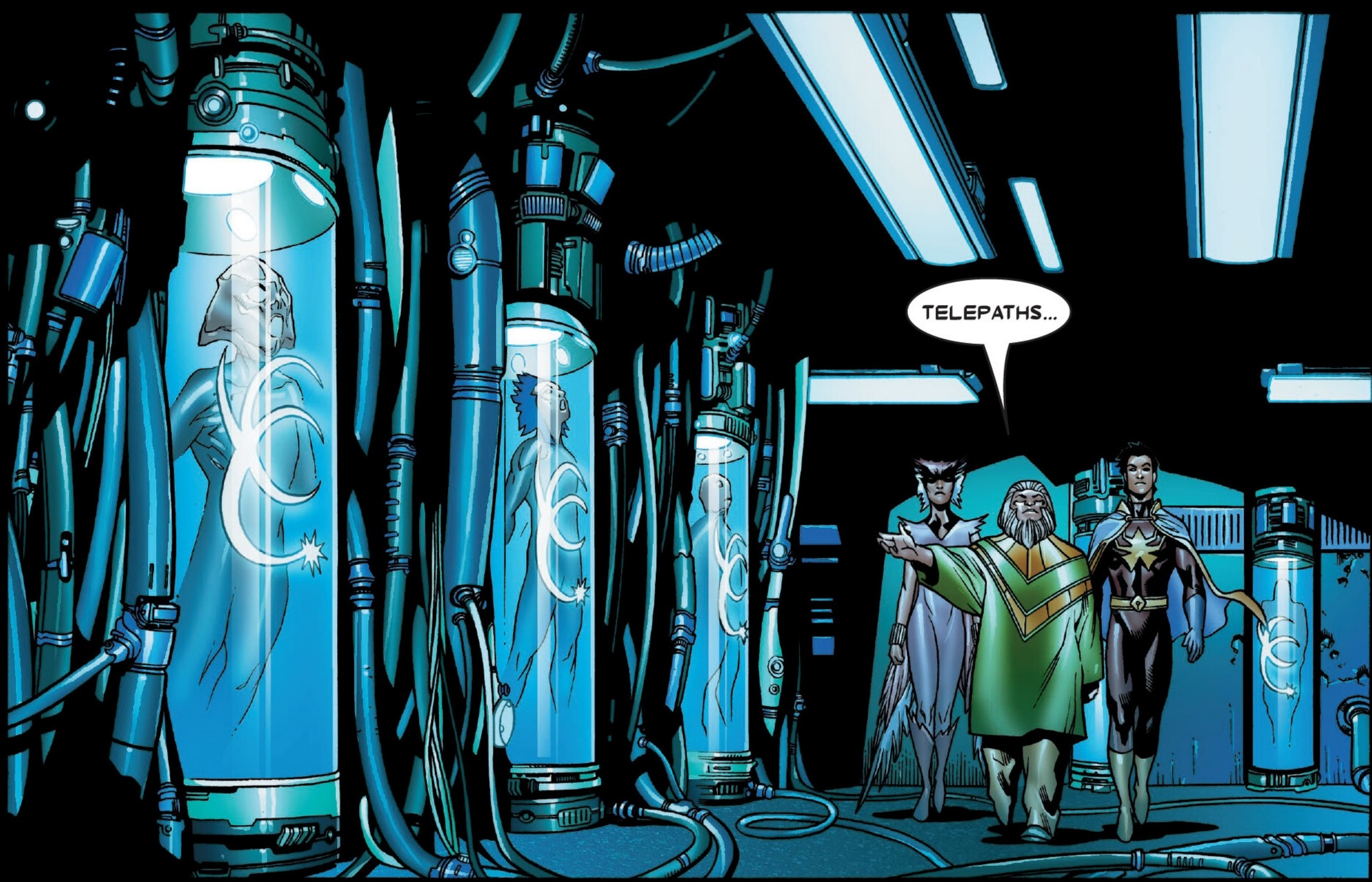
VULCAN IS MY COMPANION, ARAKI, AND HE GOES WHERE I BRING HIM.

SETTLE YOURSELF, MY LOVE...
YOU'RE WITH ME, NOW... WHAT IS PAST IS PAST.
NO! YOU DON'T KNOW--

YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW HOW IT FEELS TO YEARN FOR VENGEANCE?
HAVEN'T YOU LEARNED ANYTHING OF ME AT ALL?


PUT ASIDE YOUR WRATH...THERE ARE BIGGER THINGS AT STAKE.
I'LL TRY...FOR YOU.
AS YOU SHOULD.

AND REALLY, WE HAVEN'T YET ESTABLISHED IF IT MATTERS OR NOT.
IS D'KEN RECOVERED OR ISN'T HE, ARAKI?
I'M AFRAID... IT IS MORE COMPLICATED THAN THAT...


TELEPATHS...

...THE BEST THAT THE EMPIRE HAD TO CHOOSE FROM... AND WE CHOSE THEM ALL.
AND THEY'RE *ALL* CATATONIC NOW, AS HE WAS?

THE TREATMENT *IS* EXPERIMENTAL...
WE'VE SPENT YEARS, SLOWLY KNITTING HIS MIND BACK TOGETHER AFTER HIS EXPOSURE TO THE *M'KRANN CRYSTAL*...
EVEN *LIMITED CONTACT* WITH HIS THOUGHTS WAS ENOUGH TO DRIVE *MOST OF THEM* INSANE.

BUT AS YOU CAN *SEE*, THE EMPEROR REMAINS BEYOND OUR REACH.
THEN WHAT IS THIS *PROGRESS* THAT K'TOR SENT MESSAGE OF?
THAT IS WHERE IT GETS COMPLICATED.
OUR MOST RECENT *SCANS* OF GREAT D'KEN SHOW SOMETHING *NEW*...
...IT APPEARS, THAT WHILE HE HAS YET TO AWAKEN, THE TELEPATHS CURED HIM, TO SOME DEGREE.
HIS MIND IS CALM, HIS BRAIN PATTERNS *NEARLY* NORMAL...
BUT THE *THREE DIVISIONS* OF HIS MIND CANNOT COMMUNICATE.
THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THEM HAVE BEEN *SEVERED*.

OUR DOCTORS BELIEVE THAT OVER TIME, HIS MIND WILL GROW NEW NEURAL PATHWAYS, AND THEN HE WILL REAWAKEN, AS STRONG AS EVER.
HOW MUCH TIME?
THAT IS UNKNOWN.
DAMN THE STARS.
THIS WAS *NOT* THE SORT OF NEWS I HOPED FOR, ARAKI.
I KNOW, EMPRESS, BUT I ALSO KNOW OUR FORCES WILL FOLLOW *YOU* JUST AS FAITHFULLY AS D'KEN.
NO. *YOU* WOULD, BUT THE PEOPLE HAVE NEVER LOVED ME THE WAY THEY LOVED *HIM*.
NEURAL PATHWAYS.
ARE THOSE PARTLY CONSTRUCTED OF *ELECTRICAL IMPULSES* IN SHI'AR BRAINS, TOO?
WHAT? WHAT ARE YOU *SUGGESTING?*
THAT THERE MIGHT BE ANOTHER OPTION.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING, LIEUTENANT? OUR ORDERS WERE TO SCAN THE OUTER MOONS...
I KNOW, CAPTAIN... BUT I THOUGHT I SAW AN ENERGY FLARE AS WE WERE LEAVING ATMOSPHERE.
AND NOW I'M PICKING UP A READING OF A SHIP ON THE SURFACE, NOT FAR FROM THE EMPEROR'S HOSPICE.
WHAT SHIP?
THIS ONE.
BY THE STARS...IT'S DEATHBIRD'S.
BUT HOW COULD SHE KNOW OUR FORCES WOULD BE SO WEAK THIS DAY?
THAT'S SOMETHING I INTEND TO ASK THE CHANCELLOR PERSONALLY.
RECALL THE WARSHIPS.

OUT OF THE QUESTION. HE CANNOT BE TRUSTED...
HE WANTS D'KEN'S DEATH!
YOU ARE NOT THE ONE GIVING ORDERS HERE, ARAKI!

AND IF VULCAN SWEARS HE WON'T HARM MY BROTHER, THEN I BELIEVE HIM.
BUT...YOUR HIGHNESS...
RELAX, OLD MAN.
I'M DOING THIS FOR DEATHBIRD, NOT FOR YOU OR D'KEN OR ANYONE ELSE...

AND THERE'D BE NO HONOR IN KILLING HIM LIKE THIS, ANYWAY.
HE WOULDN'T EVEN KNOW THE DIFFERENCE.

IT'S EASIER THAN HE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE.
WITH JUST THE GENTLEST TOUCH OF HIS POWERS, HE FEELS THE DEAD PATHWAYS THAT D'KEN'S NEURONS USED TO TRAVEL THROUGHOUT HIS BRAIN...

AND HE REIGNITES THEM.

GGUUHHH... GGTT...

BY THE GODS...

YOU CONSTANTLY AMAZE ME.

I *WILL* KILL HIM, EVENTUALLY... YOU KNOW THAT.

NO... I'LL TAME YOU OF THESE *URGES*, INSTEAD.

LET THE PAST BE THE PAST...

...HELP ME TO MY FEET...

EASY, MY LORD... EASY.

YOU HAVE BEEN AWAY FROM US FOR *SOME TIME*...

CHANCELLOR ARAKI...WE HAVE A PROBLEM.

WHAT IS IT?

OUR SHIPS HAVE RETURNED, AND SCOUTS REPORT AN ENTIRE BATTALION ADVANCING TOWARDS OUR POSITION.

THEN IT APPEARS IT'S TIME OUR *SECRET ORDER* EMERGED FROM THE *SHADOWS*.

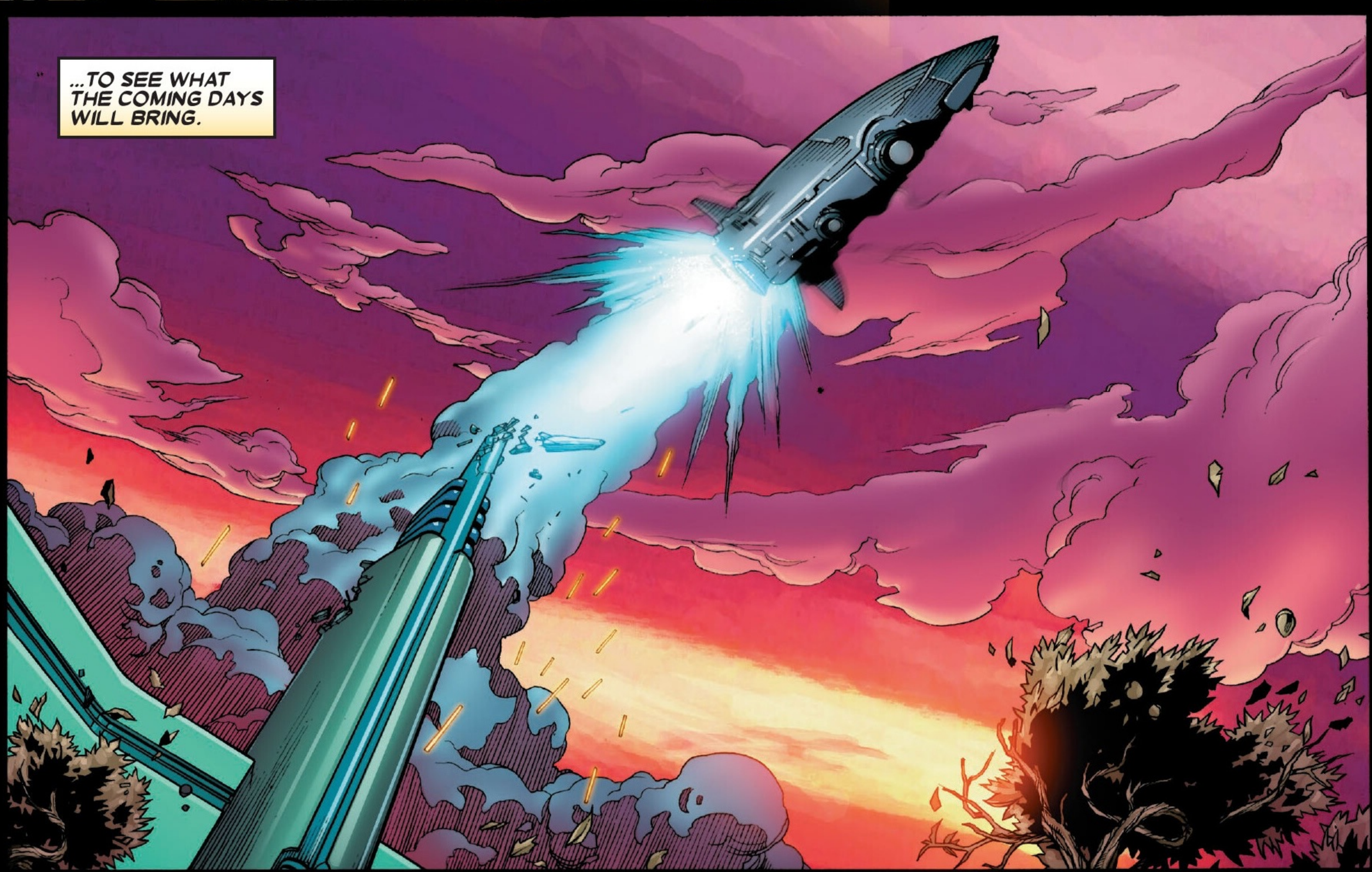
OPEN FIRE.

FROM CHANCELLOR ARAKI'S ORDER, THINGS MOVE QUICKLY AND BRUTALLY.
AND VULCAN REALIZES HE'S WITNESSING THE BEGINNING OF A MAJOR SPLIT AMONG THE SHI'AR.
MUCH AS CAESAR CROSSED THE RUBICON TO CLAIM WHAT WAS HIS...THIS IS ARAKI'S OPENING MOVE TO RESTORE D'KEN TO THE THRONE.
TO RESTORE THE SHI'AR EMPIRE TO ITS OLD WAYS.
HOLD THEM OFF!
DEFEND THE EMPEROR WITH YOUR LIVES!

AND PART OF HIM HATES HIMSELF FOR MAKING IT POSSIBLE.
PART OF HIM KNOWS HE SHOULD HAVE JUST KILLED D'KEN WHERE HE LAY.

BUT THEN THERE'S THE OTHER PART OF HIM THAT CAN'T STOP GLANCING AT DEATHBIRD...THAT SEEMS UNABLE TO REFUSE HER ANYTHING.
HE'S NEVER FELT ANYTHING LIKE THIS IN HIS STRANGE, SHORT LIFE.

AND SO, FOR NOW, HE STAYS BY HER SIDE...


...TO SEE WHAT THE COMING DAYS WILL BRING.

AND AS THOSE DAYS PASS, WHAT THEY BRING IS THE UNEXPECTED...
SISTER, LEAVE US...
...YOUR EARTHER AND I HAVE THINGS TO DISCUSS.
I DON'T THINK THAT IS WISE, BROTHER.
HE SHALL NOT BE HARMED.
IT ISN'T HIM I'M CONCERNED WITH.
GO, CAL'SYEE... I WANT TO HEAR WHAT HE HAS TO SAY.
JUST REMEMBER I HAVE NO DESIRE TO RULE, MY LOVE.

SO, ARAKI HAS TOLD ME YOUR HISTORY, AND APPARENTLY, WE HAVE MET BEFORE...
THOUGH MY MEMORY OF THOSE DAYS IS STILL HAZY.
I REMEMBER YOUR FATHER, OF COURSE... CORSAIR.
BUT YOUR BIRTH, I CONFESS, IS LOST SOMEWHERE IN MY BLOOD RAGE THAT DAY.
IF YOU'RE LOOKING TO APPEASE ME, REFERRING TO MY MOTHER'S MURDER AS MY "BIRTH" IS NOT THE WAY TO GO.
APPEASE? WHY WOULD I SEEK TO DO THAT?
I AM THE GREAT D'KEN, AND EVERYTHING YOU ARE TODAY, YOU OWE TO ME.
BUT I DO HAVE A DEBT TO YOU, THAT I MEAN TO REPAY.
AND HOW DO YOU INTEND TO DO THAT?
BY USING AN ARCANE SHI'AR LAW.
ACCORDING TO THE TEXTS, ANY CHILD BORN IN THE HIGH PALACE ON CHANDILLAR MAY RISE TO BECOME ROYALTY.
THOUGH IT WAS NEVER INTENDED TO ALLOW ONE SUCH AS YOU INTO OUR MIDST...

"...AS WE *RISE* ONCE MORE."

War of Kings #1 variant by LEINIL FRANCIS YU & LAURA MARTIN

UNCANNY X-MEN 484

THIS *CHARLES XAVIER*...YOU SAY MY LITTLE SISTER *MATED* WITH HIM?

YES, YOUR HIGHNESS. I'M SORRY TO SAY.

AND THIS ONE? WHAT DO WE KNOW OF HIM?

NOT A LOT. HE APPEARS TO BE AN EARTH MUTANT, AND HE PUT UP QUITE A FIGHT, THE GUARDS SAID...

...HE *RESISTED* ALL DAMAGE, SO THEY HAD TO PHYSICALLY *RESTRAIN HIM* UNTIL OUR MEN COULD GET THAT *COLLAR* ON HIM.

HIS NAME IS *DARWIN*... WE TRAINED TOGETHER.

SO, HE WAS A FRIEND TO YOU?

YEAH... I GUESS HE WAS.

THEN I LEAVE HIS FATE IN *YOUR* HANDS, VULCAN.

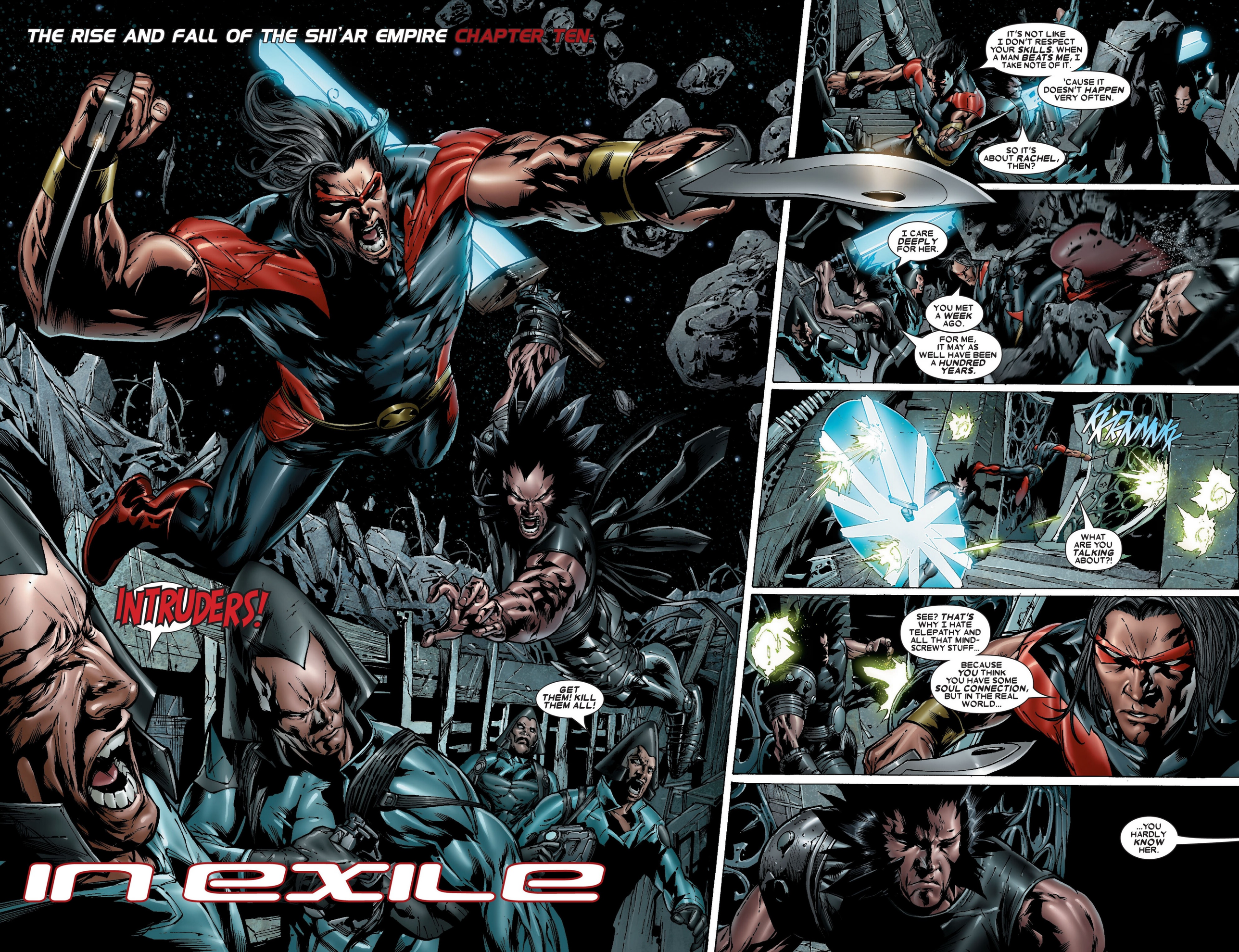
KILL HIM, MAKE HIM YOUR SLAVE, OR TURN HIM TO OUR SIDE...WHICHEVER YOU PLEASE.

BUT THIS ONE...LILANDRA WAS *ALWAYS* WEAK, AND WHEN SHE SEES HER *CONSORT* FACING *MY* JUSTICE...

...SHE WILL COME *RUNNING*...

THE ASTEROID ARCHIPELAGO–
ALL ACCESS FORBIDDEN

ASTEROID H-12


THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SHI'AR EMPIRE CHAPTER TEN:
INTRUDERS!
GET THEM! KILL THEM ALL!
IN EXILE
IT'S NOT LIKE I DON'T RESPECT YOUR SKILLS. WHEN A MAN BEATS ME, I TAKE NOTE OF IT.
'CAUSE IT DOESN'T HAPPEN VERY OFTEN.
SO IT'S ABOUT RACHEL, THEN?
I CARE DEEPLY FOR HER.
YOU MET A WEEK AGO.
FOR ME, IT MAY AS WELL HAVE BEEN A HUNDRED YEARS.
KRRAKKK
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!
SEE? THAT'S WHY I HATE TELEPATHY AND ALL THAT MIND-SCREWY STUFF...
BECAUSE YOU THINK YOU HAVE SOME SOUL CONNECTION, BUT IN THE REAL WORLD...
...YOU HARDLY KNOW HER.

THE STARJAMMER
LAST NIGHT

THIS IS *INSANE*, KORVUS...

...WE HAVE TO *STOP* THIS.

ASK ME TO STOP *BREATHING* INSTEAD.

THAT WOULD BE EASIER.

AND YOU NEED TO STOP TALKING ALL *SHAKESPEARE* LIKE THAT...

SHAAKS'PEAR? I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

THAT'S *EXACTLY* WHAT I MEAN...

YOU DON'T MAKE ANY SENSE.

BUT...WE HAVE TO STOP THIS...

...DAMN IT.

STOP THEM!

WE MAKE IT IN TIME?

YES. THEY MANAGED TO SEND A *DISTRESS SIGNAL*, BUT I JUST COUNTERMANDED IT.

AND NO OTHER SIGNALS WILL BE GETTING OFF THIS ROCK.

THOUGH, ONCE OUR PEOPLE HIT THE *FACILITY*, IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF *TIME* UNTIL WARBIRDS ARRIVE.

WE'LL BE LONG GONE BY THEN.

SHADOWLARKS ONE AND TWO, YOU'RE CLEAR FOR ENTRY...

"...AND WE'LL BE *RIGHT* BEHIND YOU."

SHADOWLARK ONE

CREW: CORSAIR, LILANDRA, HAVOK AND POLARIS

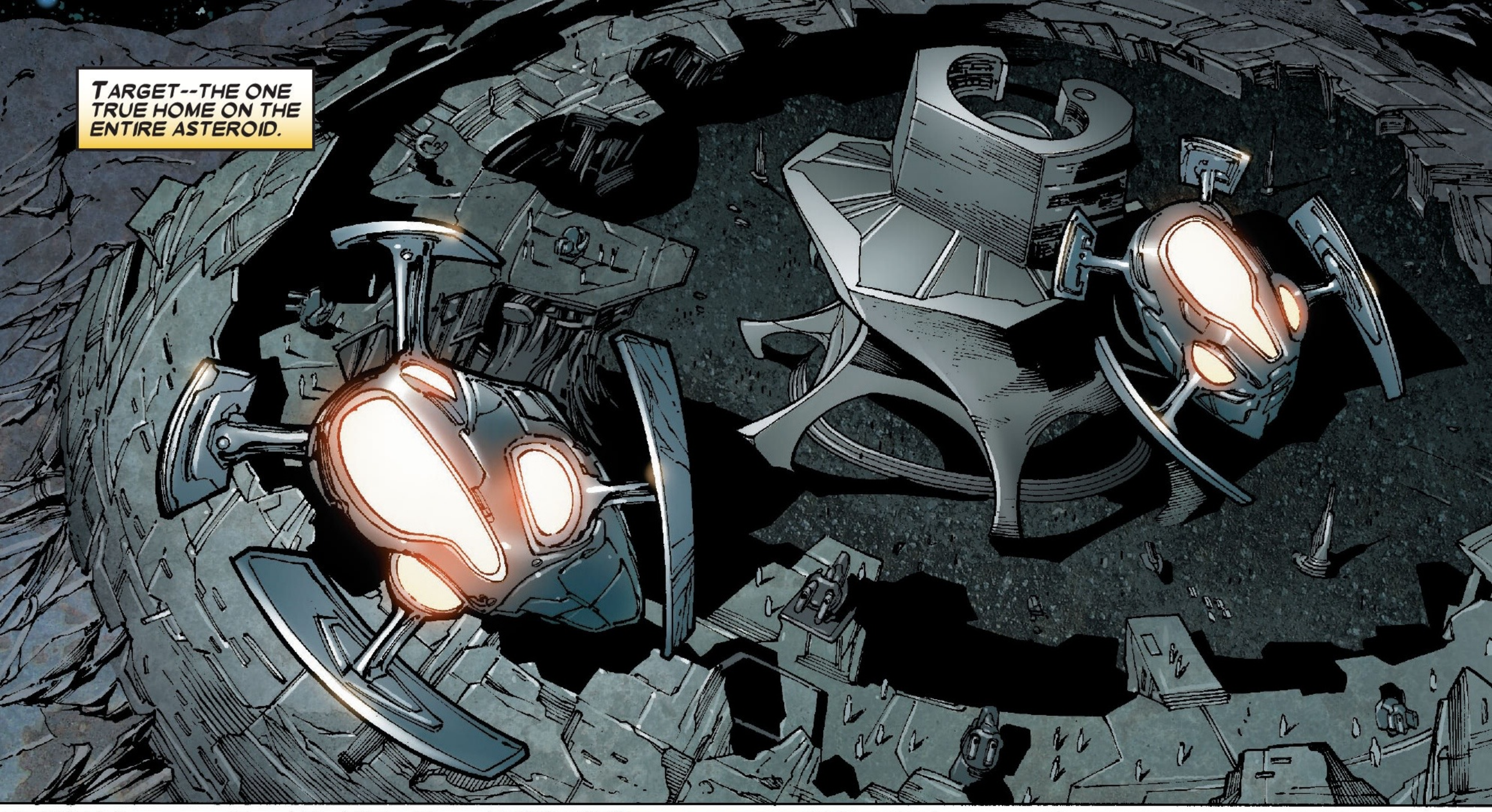
ALL RIGHT... THEIR DEFENSES ARE STRONG, SO WE HIT THEM *FAST*.

SHADOWLARK TWO

CREW: CH'OD, RAZA, RACHEL AND NIGHTCRAWLER

THEY MAY BE EXPECTING **TROUBLE**, BUT THEY AREN'T EXPECTING **US**.

NO ONE EVER *IS*, MY FRIEND...


TARGET--THE ONE TRUE HOME ON THE ENTIRE ASTEROID.

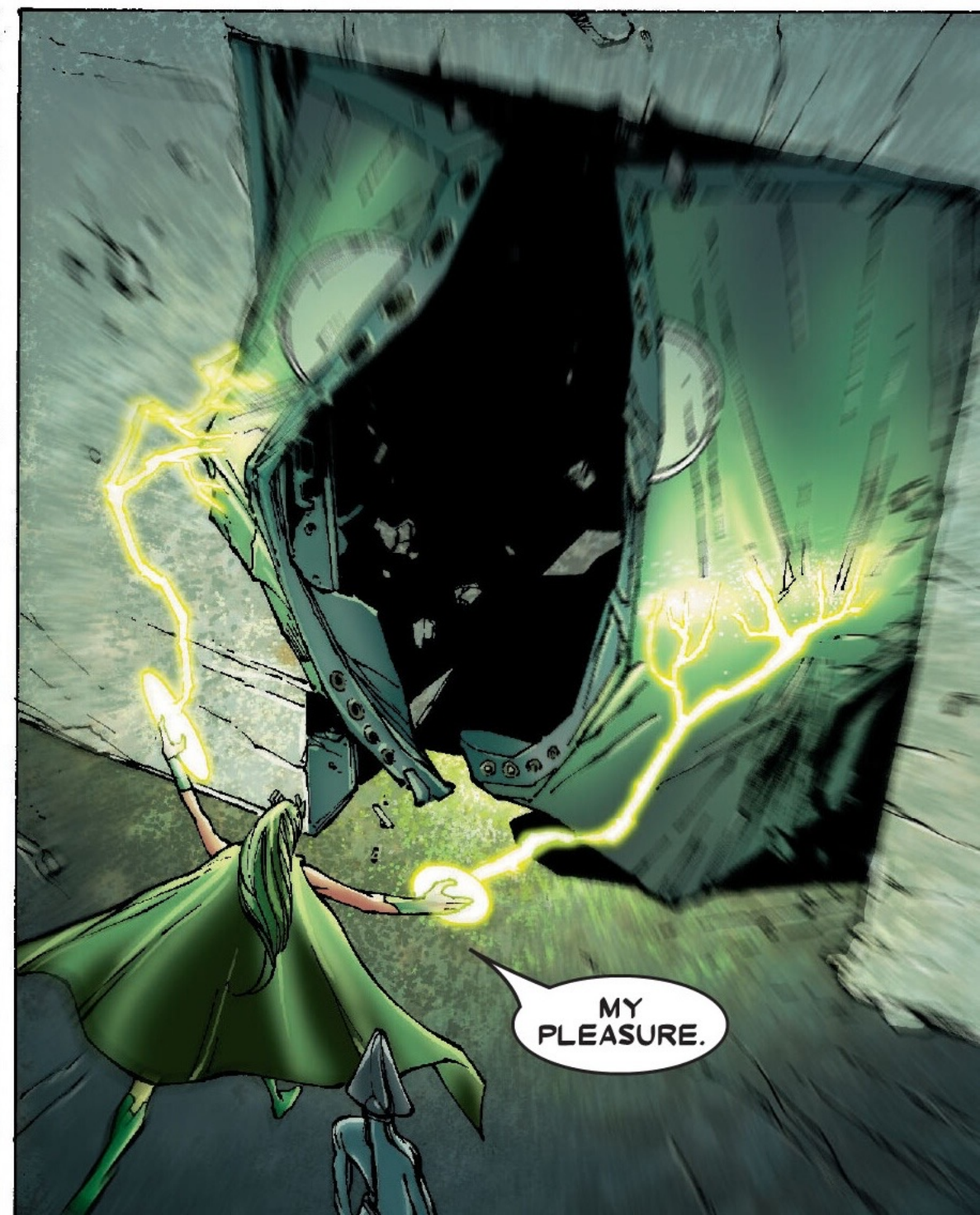
GUARDED BY AN ENTIRE REGIMENT OF HIGHLY TRAINED SHI'AR SOLDIERS.
LOOK TO THE SKIES!
WE ARE UNDER ATTACK!

MORE A FORTRESS, REALLY, THAN A HOME.

GREED
I THOUGHT YOU KNEW HOW TO DRIVE THAT?
I DO. I'M JUST FAMILIARIZING MYSELF WITH THE NEW CONTROLS...
FAMILIARIZE FASTER, THEN... IT'S STARTED.
HOW CAN YOU...?
ENHANCED SENSES...EVEN ON A CRAZY SPACE ROCK LIKE THIS, I CAN FEEL THE GROUND TREMBLING MILES AWAY.
THEN LET'S GO.
VVRRROOMMM
THIS IS MORE LIKE IT!

YOU KNOW THE WAY, MY LADY?
IT'S *NOT* MY FIRST TIME HERE, CORSAIR. I HAD THIS FACILITY BUILT.

IT'S THROUGH *HERE*, BUT IT'S NOT GOING TO BE AN EASY PATH.
LET US WORRY ABOUT THAT, LILANDRA.
LORNA, GET THE DOORS.


MY PLEASURE.

GO AWAY. NOW.

YAAAHHHGGG!

RACHEL. BE CAREFUL... THERE IS NO NEED FOR LETHAL FORCE.

THIS IS A WAR, KURT... THERE'S GOING TO BE DYING.

I'D RATHER IT WAS THEM DOING IT, AND NOT US.

THAT IS NOT THE RACHEL I KNOW.

YEAH, IT IS.

IT'S THE ONE WHOSE FAMILY WAS SLAUGHTERED... AND WHO HAD A DEATH SENTENCE PUT ON HER HEAD BY THESE PEOPLE.

WORRY NOT ABOUT THE GIRL, NIGHTCRAWLER! SHE'S BATTLE-HARDENED, AS SHE NEEDS TO BE!

MY FEARS LIE WITH LILANDRA, AND WHAT WE WILL FACE SHOULD SHE *FAIL!*

AAGGHH!

YOUR HIGHNESS!

UHN!

WE'VE GOT 'EM, DAD!

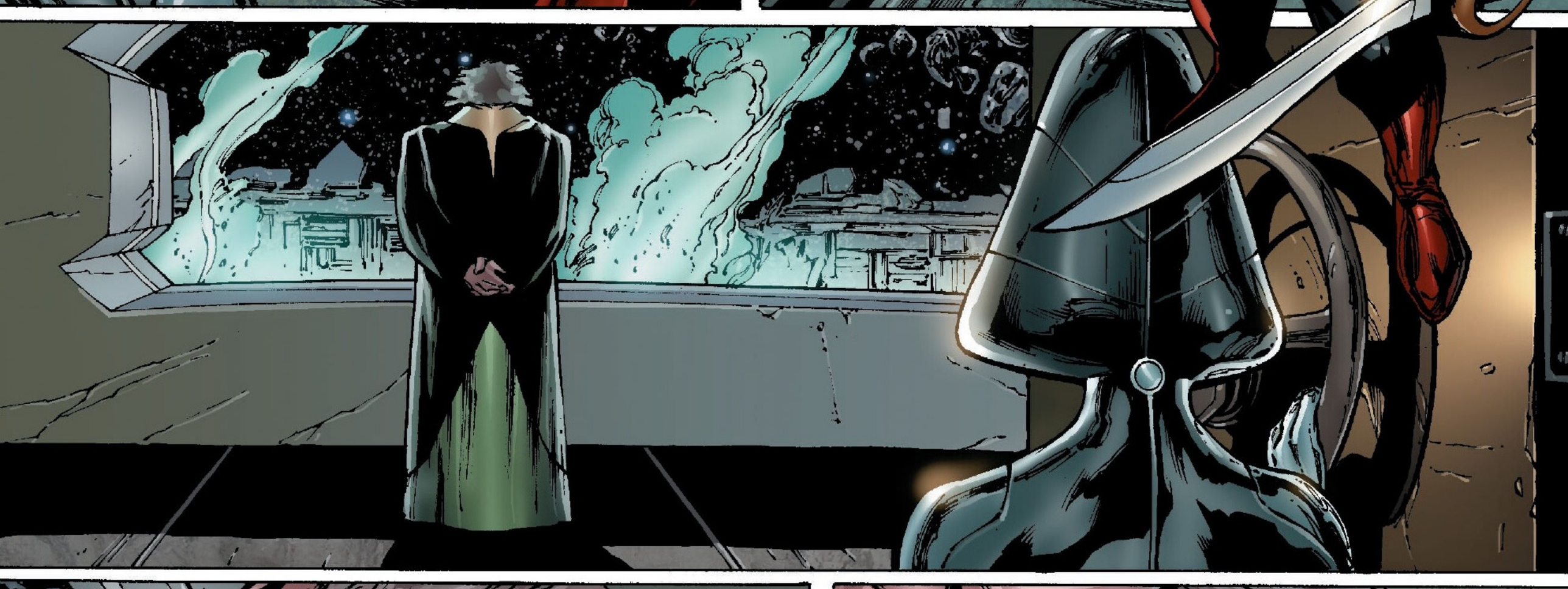
WE'LL HOLD THEM OFF!

ARE YOU *HURT?*

ONLY MY EGO...AND IT COULD *USE* A LITTLE BRUISING, I SUPPOSE.

DO YOU THINK YOU COULD HAVE ORDERED THEM TO STATION A FEW *MORE* TROOPS HERE?
I APOLOGIZE...
WHEN I HAD HIM *PLACED HERE*, I NEVER IMAGINED I'D BE THE ONE TRYING TO ENGINEER HIS ESCAPE...

I JUST WANTED HIM *GONE* AND FORGOTTEN.
DO YOU NEED MY HELP IN THERE?
NO, YOU'VE ALL PLAYED YOUR PARTS...THIS IS *MINE*.

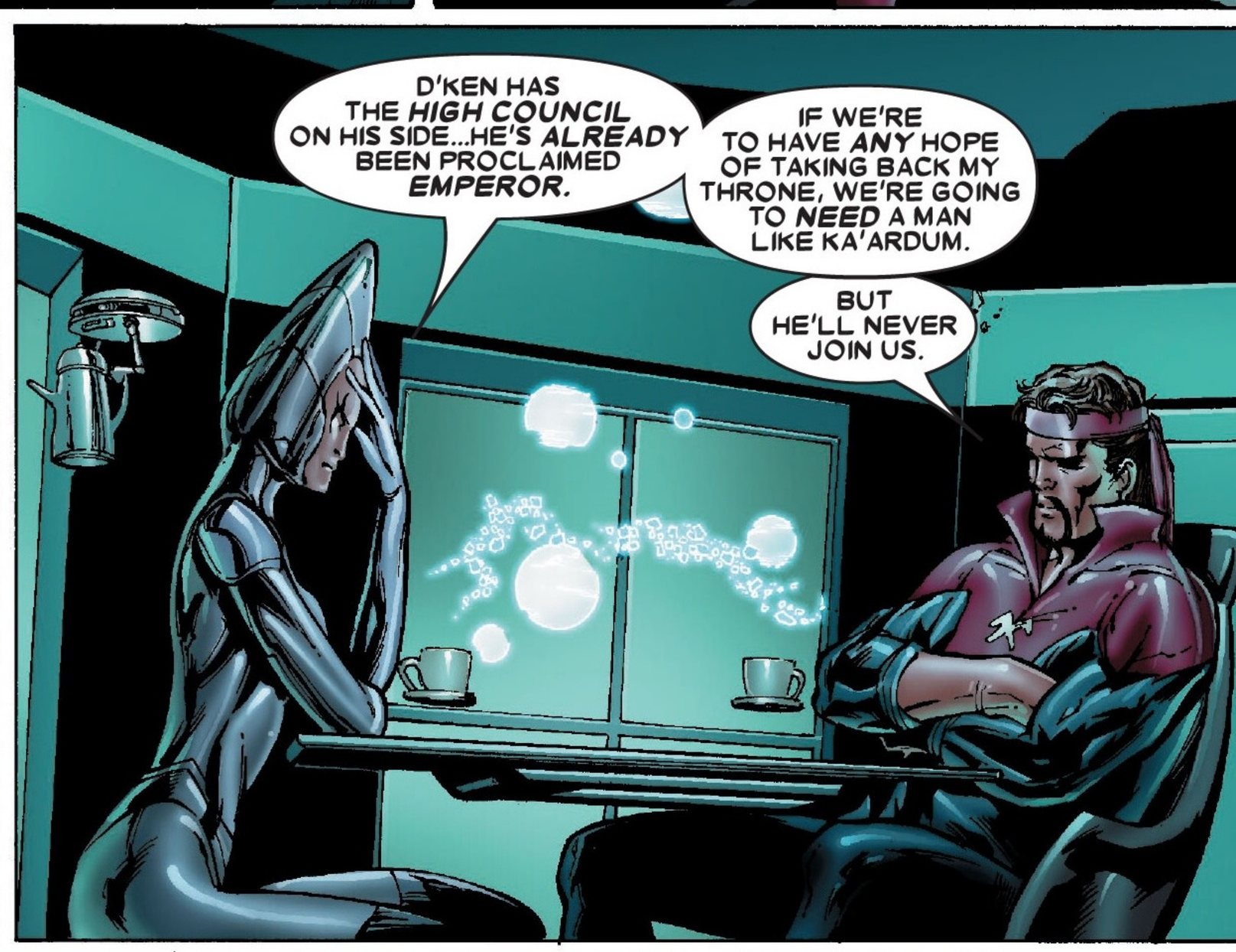


LILANDRA NERAMANI.
YOU'LL FORGIVE ME IF I DO NOT *BOW*...
MAJOR-GENERAL KA'ARDUM... IT'S BEEN *TOO LONG*.

THE STARJAMMER
YESTERDAY
ARE YOU IN CHARGE NOW? IS THAT IT? BECAUSE I THOUGHT THIS WAS MY SHIP...
AND I DON'T WASTE FUEL ON FOOLS' ERRANDS.

I AM NOT COMMANDEERING YOUR VESSEL, CORSAIR... BUT NEITHER IS IT A FOOLISH RISK.
IF WE CAN GET MAJOR-GENERAL KA'ARDUM TO JOIN US, WE MAY--
HE NEARLY TOOK YOUR THRONE FOR HIMSELF. HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN WHY YOU HAD HIM BANISHED?

NO, NOR HAVE I FORGOTTEN THAT HE ONCE COMMANDED THE ENTIRE SHI'AR ARMADA.

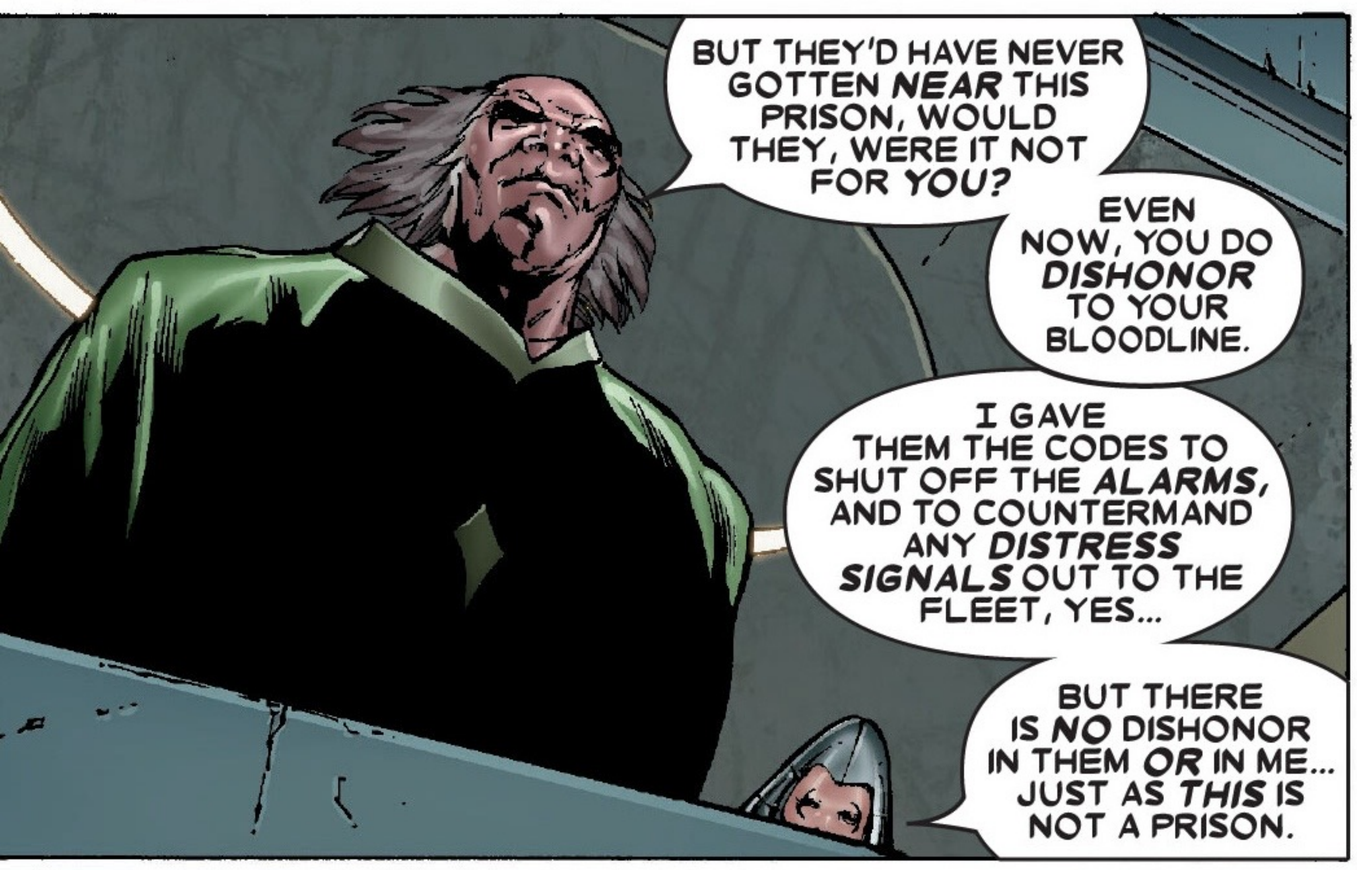

D'KEN HAS THE HIGH COUNCIL ON HIS SIDE...HE'S ALREADY BEEN PROCLAIMED EMPEROR.
IF WE'RE TO HAVE ANY HOPE OF TAKING BACK MY THRONE, WE'RE GOING TO NEED A MAN LIKE KA'ARDUM.
BUT HE'LL NEVER JOIN US.

AFTER YEARS ON THAT ROCK, WE'LL BE LUCKY IF HE DOESN'T JUST TRY TO KILL YOU.

I AM NOT AFRAID OF HIM...
I'M AFRAID OF WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MY BROTHER REALIZES THE GREAT MAJOR-GENERAL IS NOT DEAD...BUT IN EXILE.

"ALIGNING YOURSELF WITH THE *STARJAMMERS* AND MORE OF YOUR PET EARTHERS AGAIN, I SEE...

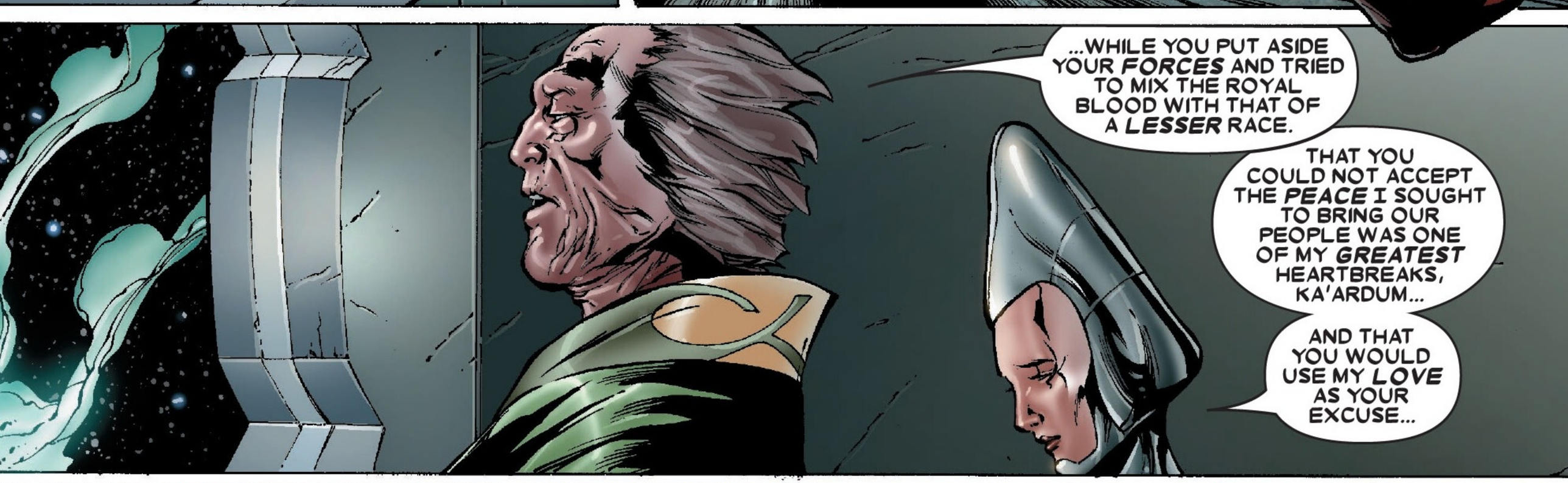
"THEY FIGHT WELL ENOUGH, IT'S TRUE..."

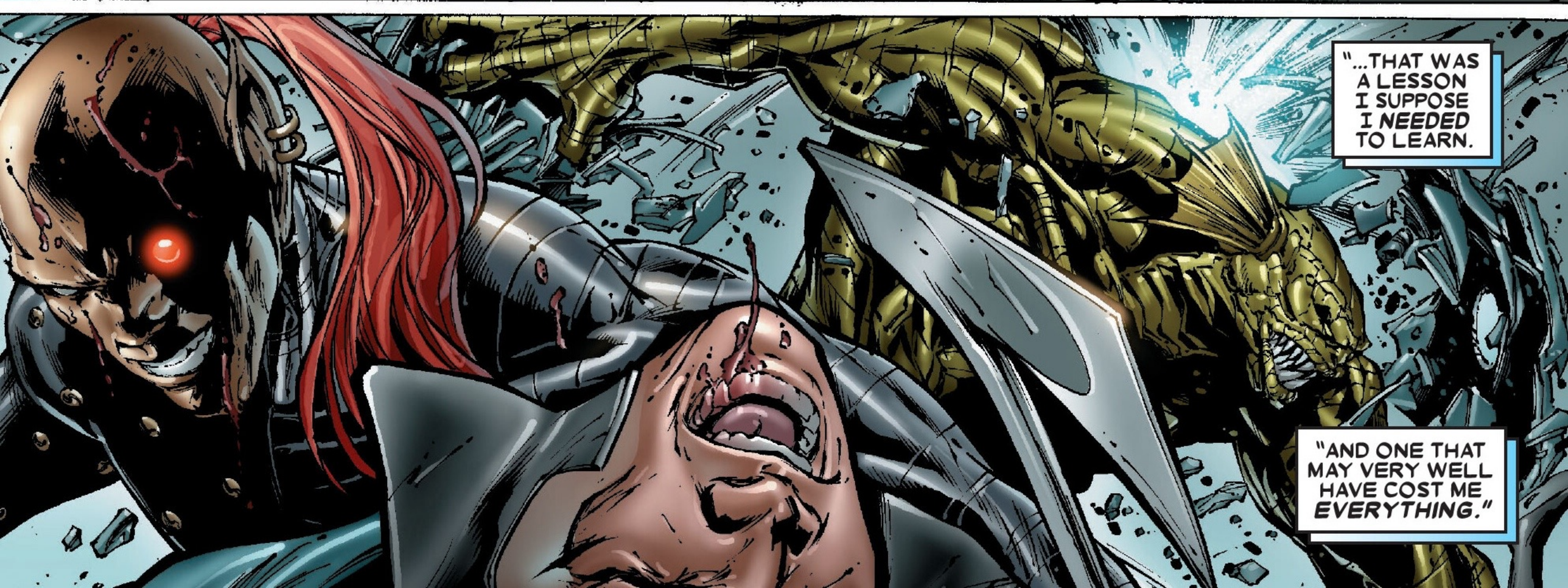


"...I ONLY SOUGHT TO RETURN THE IMPERIUM TO ITS PROPER PATH."

AND WHICH PATH IS THAT, KA'ARDUM? THE PATH OF EXPANSION... LIKE MY FATHER'S RULE?
OR MY BROTHER'S PATH...THAT OF DESTRUCTION?
YOU KNOW MY ANSWER TO THAT.

"YOUR BROTHER NEVER HAD MY LOVE...
"...BUT HE LET ME BE A SOLDIER..."

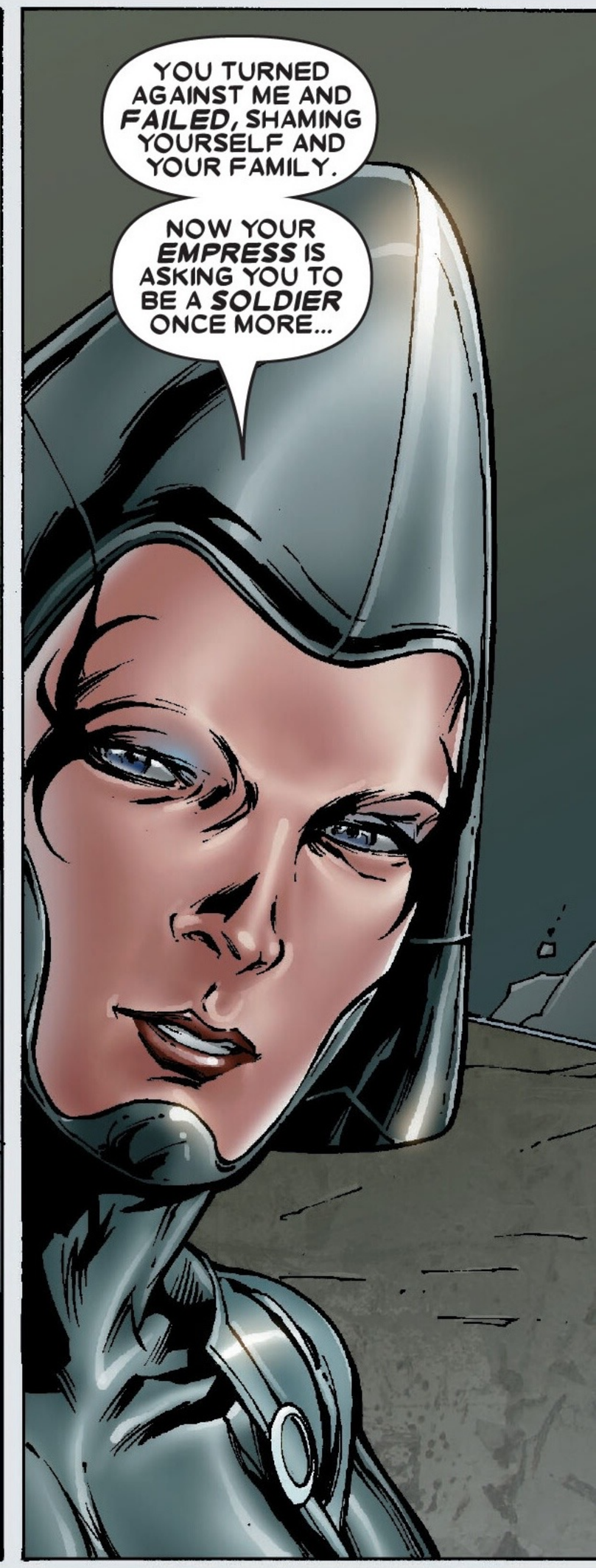

...WHILE YOU PUT ASIDE YOUR FORCES AND TRIED TO MIX THE ROYAL BLOOD WITH THAT OF A LESSER RACE.
THAT YOU COULD NOT ACCEPT THE PEACE I SOUGHT TO BRING OUR PEOPLE WAS ONE OF MY GREATEST HEARTBREAKS, KA'ARDUM...
AND THAT YOU WOULD USE MY LOVE AS YOUR EXCUSE...

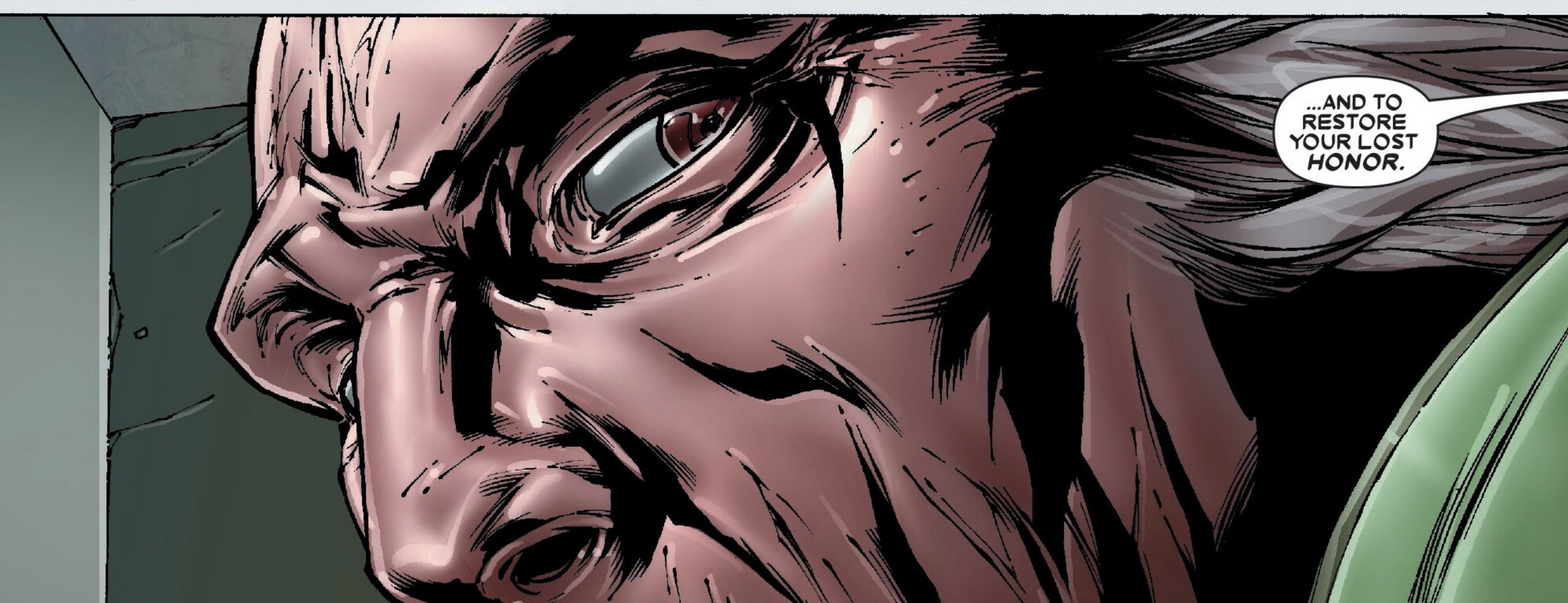

"...THAT WAS A LESSON I SUPPOSE I NEEDED TO LEARN.
"AND ONE THAT MAY VERY WELL HAVE COST ME EVERYTHING."

SO IT'S *TRUE?* D'KEN *HAS* AWAKENED, AFTER ALL THESE YEARS?
THAT YOU'VE HEARD THIS IS *ANOTHER* REASON I NEED YOU, UNCLE...
EVEN IN EXILE, YOUR FINGER TOUCHES THE PULSE OF THIS EMPIRE.

HOW MANY *WARBIRDS* WOULD ANSWER YOUR CALL, EVEN NOW? A THIRD OF THE ARMADA? MORE?
HOW MUCH *LOYALTY* DOES THE GREAT MAJOR-GENERAL STILL COMMAND?
YOU CAN'T THINK I WILL JOIN YOU? WITH YOUR OUTLAWS AND EARTHERS? TO FIGHT MY OWN KIND?

I DO... BECAUSE YOU LOVE THIS EMPIRE AS MUCH AS I DO, IN YOUR *OWN* WAY.
I AM OFFERING YOU A CHANCE TO *SAVE* IT...AND SOMETHING *ELSE*, AS WELL...
AND WHAT IS THAT?


YOU TURNED AGAINST ME AND *FAILED*, SHAMING YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY.
NOW YOUR *EMPRESS* IS ASKING YOU TO BE A *SOLDIER* ONCE MORE...


...AND TO RESTORE YOUR LOST *HONOR.*

REMOTE LISTENING STATION

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, THEY AREN'T RESPONDING?

EXACTLY THAT, VICE-CHANCELLOR.

WE RECEIVED A POSSIBLE ALERT FROM ASTEROID H-12, THEN A SECOND SIGNAL COUNTERMANDING THE ALERT MOMENTS LATER.

ALL WITHIN PROCEDURAL CODE... BUT WITH THE OCCUPANT OF ASTEROID H-12, WE THOUGHT IT BEST TO BE SURE.

AND ALL COMMUNICATION IS CUT OFF NOW?

YES SIR. VISUAL FEEDS ARE ALL DOWN AS WELL.

DAMN HER. WHY COULDN'T SHE HAVE BEEN THIS AGGRESSIVE WHEN SHE NEEDED TO BE?

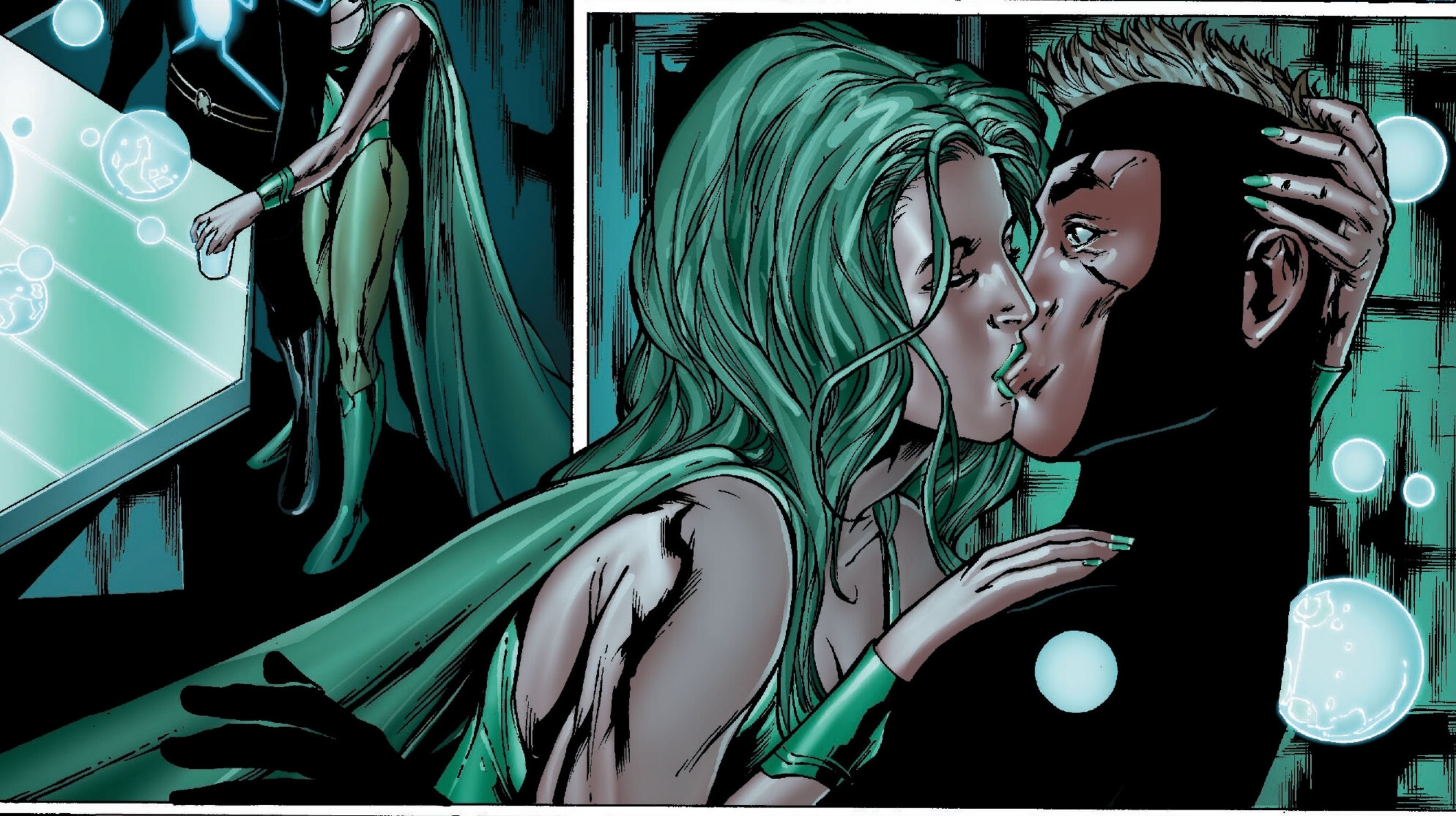
SIR...WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

IF I WERE YOU, I'D ENJOY MY LAST FEW DAYS OF LIGHT DUTY... AND GET READY FOR WAR.

THE STARJAMMER
HOURS LATER

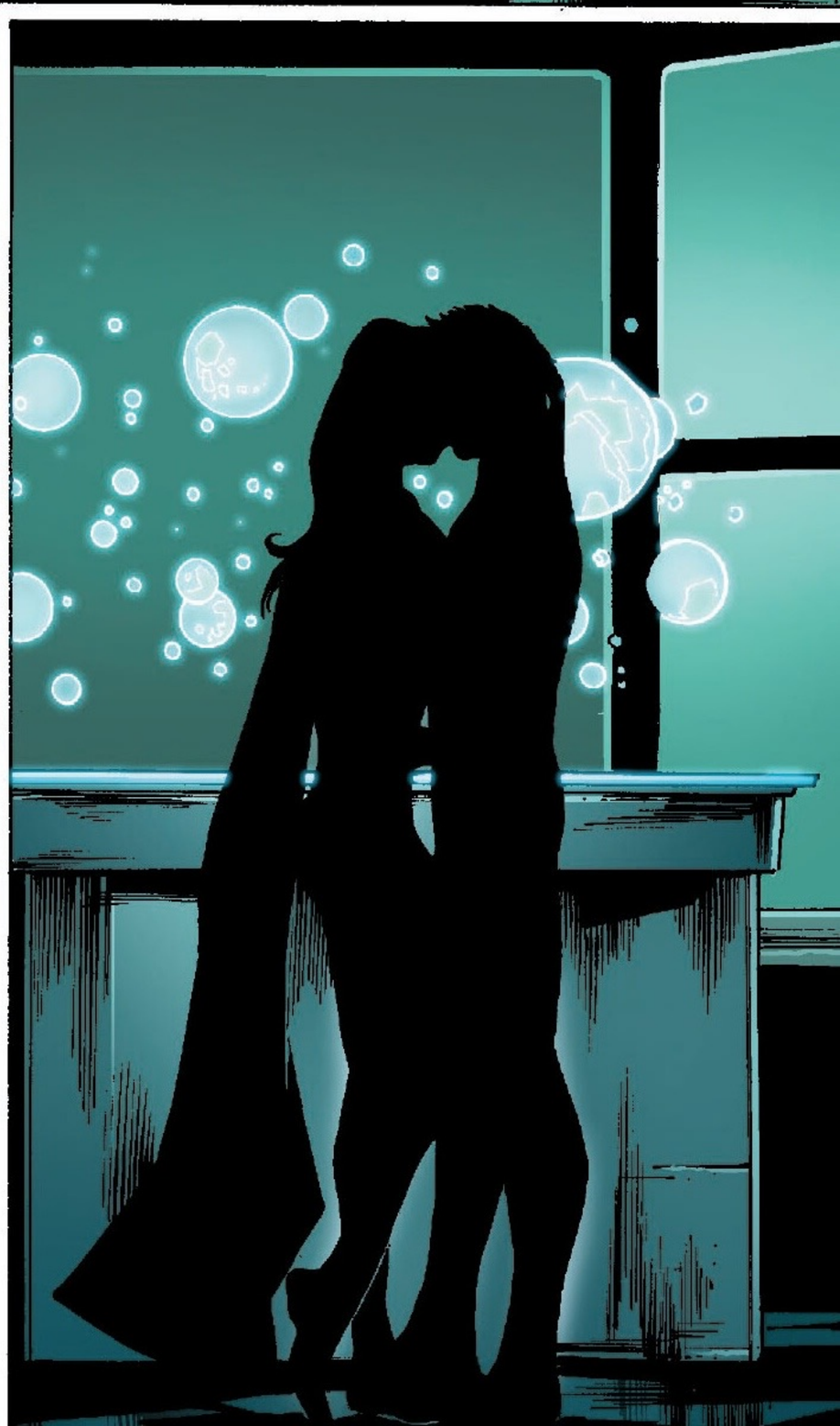
IS STUDYING THOSE STAR-CHARTS GOING TO CHANGE ANY OF THAT TONIGHT?
WHAT?

DON'T GET ME WRONG, I LOVE IT WHEN YOU GET ALL *DRIVEN* LIKE THIS...
BUT IF *ANYONE* NEEDS TO BLOW OFF STEAM ABOUT NOW, ALEX SUMMERS, IT'S *YOU*.
LORNA, IT'S NOT JUST--



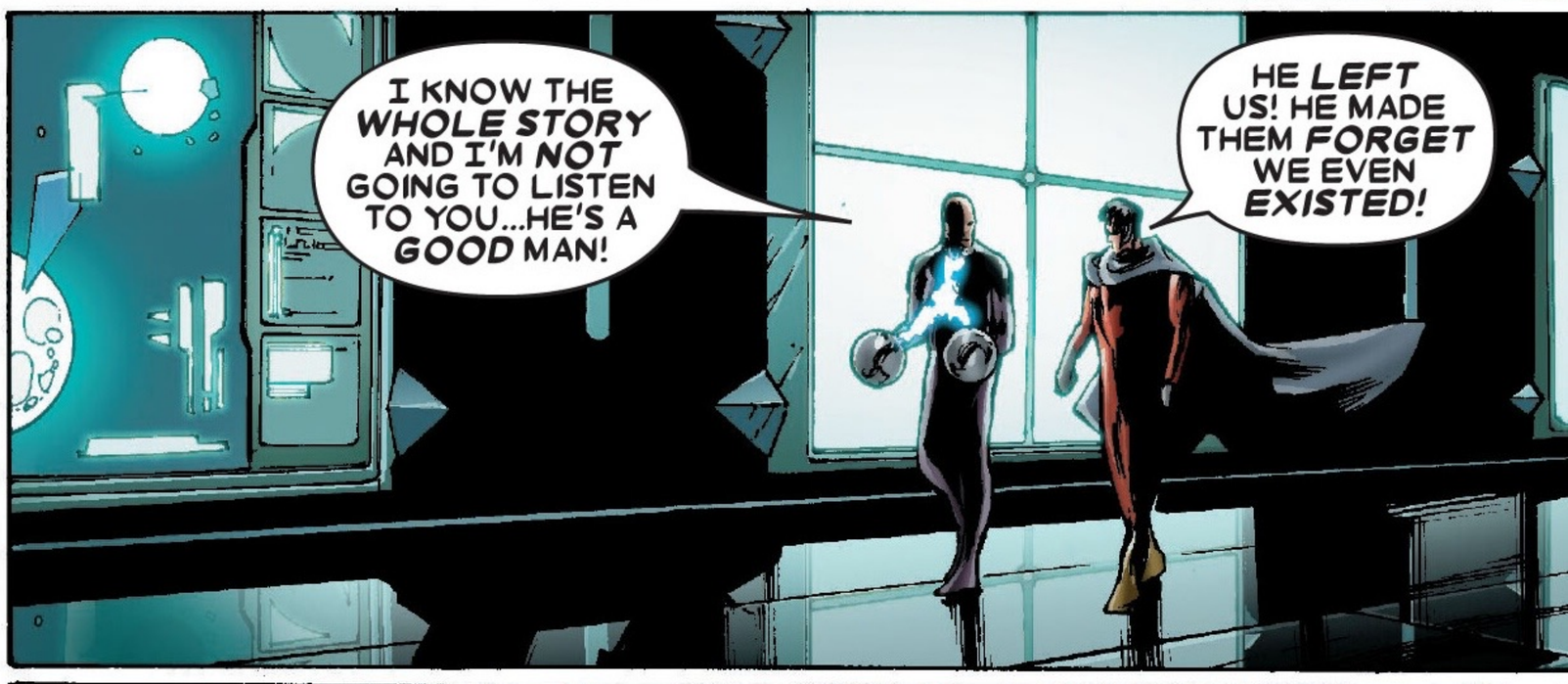
WHAT-WHAT ARE YOU-- WE CAN'T JUST *START UP* AGAIN. NOT AFTER--
ALEX, WE'RE IN SPACE, IN THE MIDDLE OF A WAR, WE HAVE NO IDEA IF THE *PROFESSOR* IS DEAD OR ALIVE, OR IF WE'LL *EVER* SEE EARTH AGAIN.
AND TODAY WE *HELD OFF* AN ENTIRE *REGIMENT* OF SHI'AR SOLDIERS.

JUST SHUT UP AND KISS ME.



THE HIGH COUNCIL'S ARMADA

NO NO NO!


I KNOW THE WHOLE STORY AND I'M NOT GOING TO LISTEN TO YOU...HE'S A GOOD MAN!
HE LEFT US! HE MADE THEM FORGET WE EVEN EXISTED!

YOU'VE KILLED PEOPLE!
AND WORSE, YOU KILLED THEM FOR NO REASON!
I HAD A REASON...

I WAS THERE, GABRIEL...INSIDE YOUR HEAD. I KNOW WHY YOU DID IT... REVENGE. AND YOU DIDN'T EVEN GET THAT.
BANSHEE, THE INNOCENT PEOPLE ON THAT PLANE, THE MAN FLYING THAT SENTINEL...JUST WASTED LIVES.

DESTROYED FOR YOUR RAGE... DID ANY OF IT MAKE YOU FEEL ANY BETTER?
I FEEL FINE.
THEN YOU'RE A MONSTER.

I'M WHAT THEY MADE ME.
REALLY? DID THEY MAKE YOU LOSE YOUR CONSCIENCE OR DID YOU JUST NEVER HAVE ONE?

I COULD HAVE LET THEM KILL YOU...BUT I DIDN'T.
DON'T MAKE ME REGRET THAT DECISION.

WHAT DID YOU THINK? THAT I'D BE HAPPY TO SEE YOU?
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HAPPY, BUT YOU'RE THE CLOSEST THING I'VE GOT IN THIS UNIVERSE TO A FRIEND, DARWIN...
...SO I WAS KIND OF HOPING YOU'D BE THE BEST MAN AT MY WEDDING.
YOUR-- WHA-- WHAT?!

YOU HEARD ME RIGHT...IN THREE DAYS, I'M GOING TO MARRY THE EMPEROR'S SISTER...

XAVIER TO FACE IMPERIAL JUSTICE
...AND PROFESSOR XAVIER'S PUBLIC EXECUTION WILL BE THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE AFTER-PARTY.

UNCANNY X-MEN 485

--AND SO I CALL ON ALL SHI'AR SOLDIERS TO **RENOUNCE** THE MADMAN YOU CALL EMPEROR, AND JOIN **ME** ALONGSIDE LILANDRA NERAMANI...

...TO FIGHT FOR THE RETURN OF THE **TRUE IMPERIUM** THAT IS OUR VERY **LIFEBLOOD!**

DO NOT LET THESE **ATROCITIES** STAND! DO NOT LET **POLITICIANS** BEND YOU TO THEIR WILL! FIGHT **ALONGSIDE** ME! OR FACE **DEATH** AT MY HANDS!

SO YOU HAVEN'T FOUND A WAY TO SHUT DOWN THEIR SIGNAL?

NO, INDEED, GREAT D'KEN, FOR THREE DAYS IT HAS BEEN SPREADING LIKE A ***VIRUS*** THROUGH THE FLEETS.

NEARLY A ***THIRD*** HAVE LEFT OUR RANKS TO JOIN LILANDRA AND ***MAJOR-GENERAL*** KA'ARDUM'S FORCES.

PFFFT... IT HARDLY MATTERS.

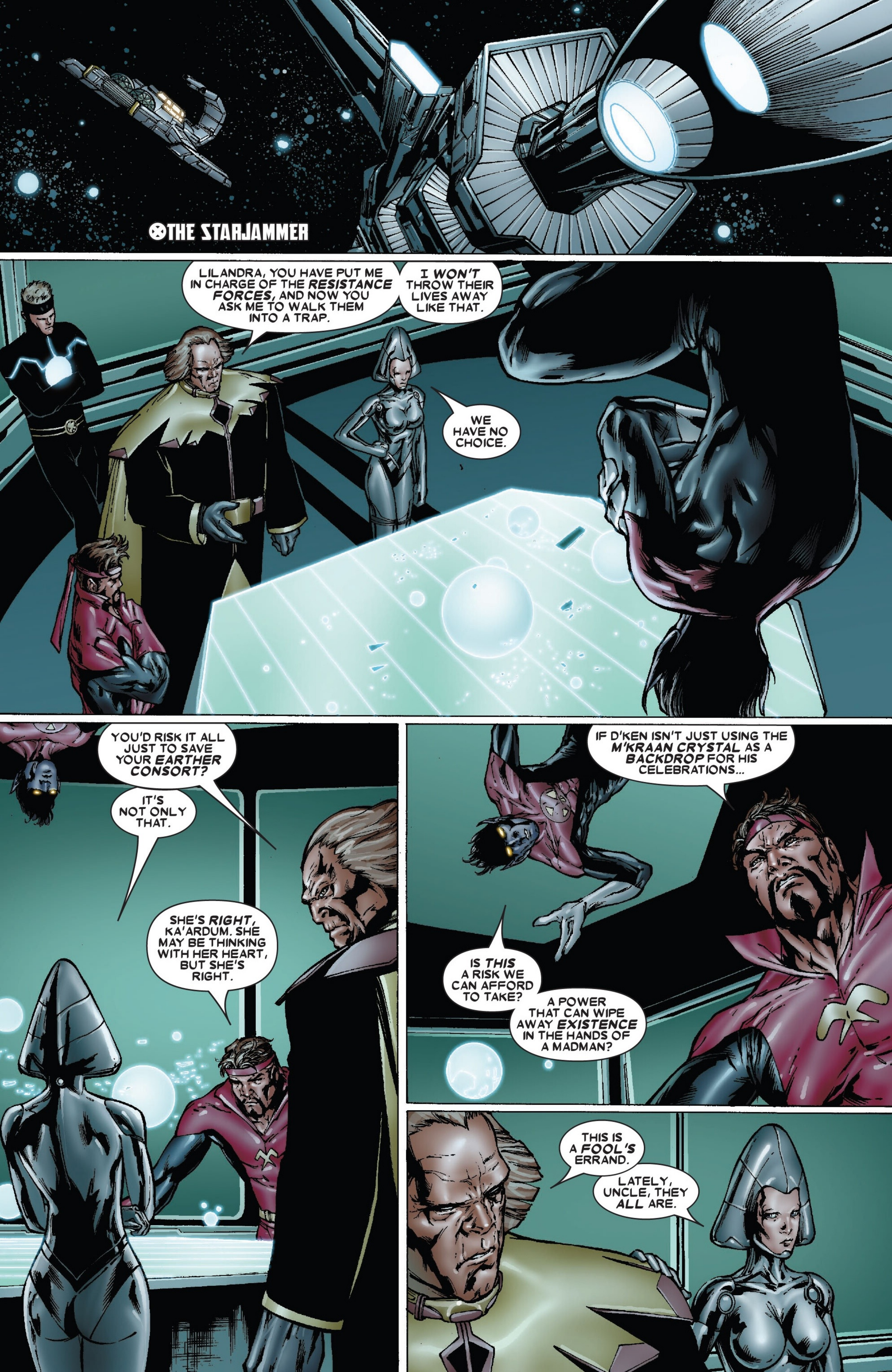
WE OUTNUMBER THEM TWO-TO-ONE, ***AND*** WE HAVE THE IMPERIAL GUARD.

BESIDES, WE'VE CHOSEN OUR ***BATTLEGROUND,*** AND IT'S ONE THAT MY LITTLE SISTER AND HER FOOLS CANNOT ***HOPE*** TO RESIST.

I PRAY YOU ARE ***RIGHT,*** YOUR HIGHNESS.

I ALWAYS AM, ARAKI...NOW TAKE US ***DOWN.*** WE HAVE A ROYAL ***WEDDING*** TO PERFORM...

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SHI'AR EMPIRE CHAPTER ELEVEN:
THE END OF ALL THAT IS
"...AND BEFORE THIS DAY IS DONE, OUR ENEMIES WILL LIE AT MY FEET."


THE STARJAMMER
LILANDRA, YOU HAVE PUT ME IN CHARGE OF THE RESISTANCE FORCES, AND NOW YOU ASK ME TO WALK THEM INTO A TRAP.
I WON'T THROW THEIR LIVES AWAY LIKE THAT.
WE HAVE NO CHOICE.
YOU'D RISK IT ALL JUST TO SAVE YOUR EARTHER CONSORT?
IT'S NOT ONLY THAT.
SHE'S RIGHT, KA'ARDUM. SHE MAY BE THINKING WITH HER HEART, BUT SHE'S RIGHT.
IF D'KEN ISN'T JUST USING THE M'KRAAN CRYSTAL AS A BACKDROP FOR HIS CELEBRATIONS...
IS THIS A RISK WE CAN AFFORD TO TAKE?
A POWER THAT CAN WIPE AWAY EXISTENCE IN THE HANDS OF A MADMAN?
THIS IS A FOOL'S ERRAND.
LATELY, UNCLE, THEY ALL ARE.

IT IS. DONE, THEN, GLADIATOR?

YES, MY EMPEROR. I SPOKE TO THE *GUARDIAN*, JAHF, AND HE AGREED TO A TEMPORARY *ACCORD* FOR THE DAY, SO LONG AS WE STICK TO OUR TERMS.

I HAVE *NO DESIRE* TO TOUCH THE INSIDE OF THAT CURSED WORLD *EVER* AGAIN...SO HE NEED NOT WORRY.

ONLY *ONE MAN* WILL FACE THOSE HORRORS THIS DAY.

WILL IT *KILL HIM?*

YOU DO *NOT* WANT TO FIND OUT WHAT THE M'KRAAN CRYSTAL WILL DO TO ANY WHO ENTER IT.

BUT KNOW THAT YOUR *WEDDED BLISS* WILL BE ACCOMPANIED BY THE *SCREAMS* OF CHARLES XAVIER, LONG INTO THE NIGHT.

NOW, IT IS TIME YOU MADE MY SISTER A RIGHTEOUS WOMAN, AND ELEVATED *YOURSELF* TO LIFE AMONG YOUR BETTERS. WHERE IS YOUR WITNESS?

DARWIN? PROBABLY SAYING HIS *FAREWELLS* TO OUR OLD TEACHER...OR TRYING TO FIND A WAY TO *SAVE HIM*, BUT HE WON'T...

NO...IT'S GOING TO BE MY DAY...A *GREAT* DAY.

PROFESSOR? WAKE UP...

UHHN...

...DARWIN... WHERE-- WHERE ARE WE?

WE'RE AT THE *M'KRAAN CRYSTAL*... YOU REMEMBER WHAT THAT IS?

...YES...WHY...? WHAT FOOL... BROUGHT US... HERE...?

WE DON'T HAVE A LOT OF *TIME*, PROFESSOR, I NEED YOU TO *HELP ME*.

I'M IN NO...SHAPE TO...

HELP YOU WITH... WHAT?

THEY MEAN TO *KILL YOU*, SIR. TODAY. AFTER THE *WEDDING*. THEY'RE MAKING A BIG SHOW OF IT.

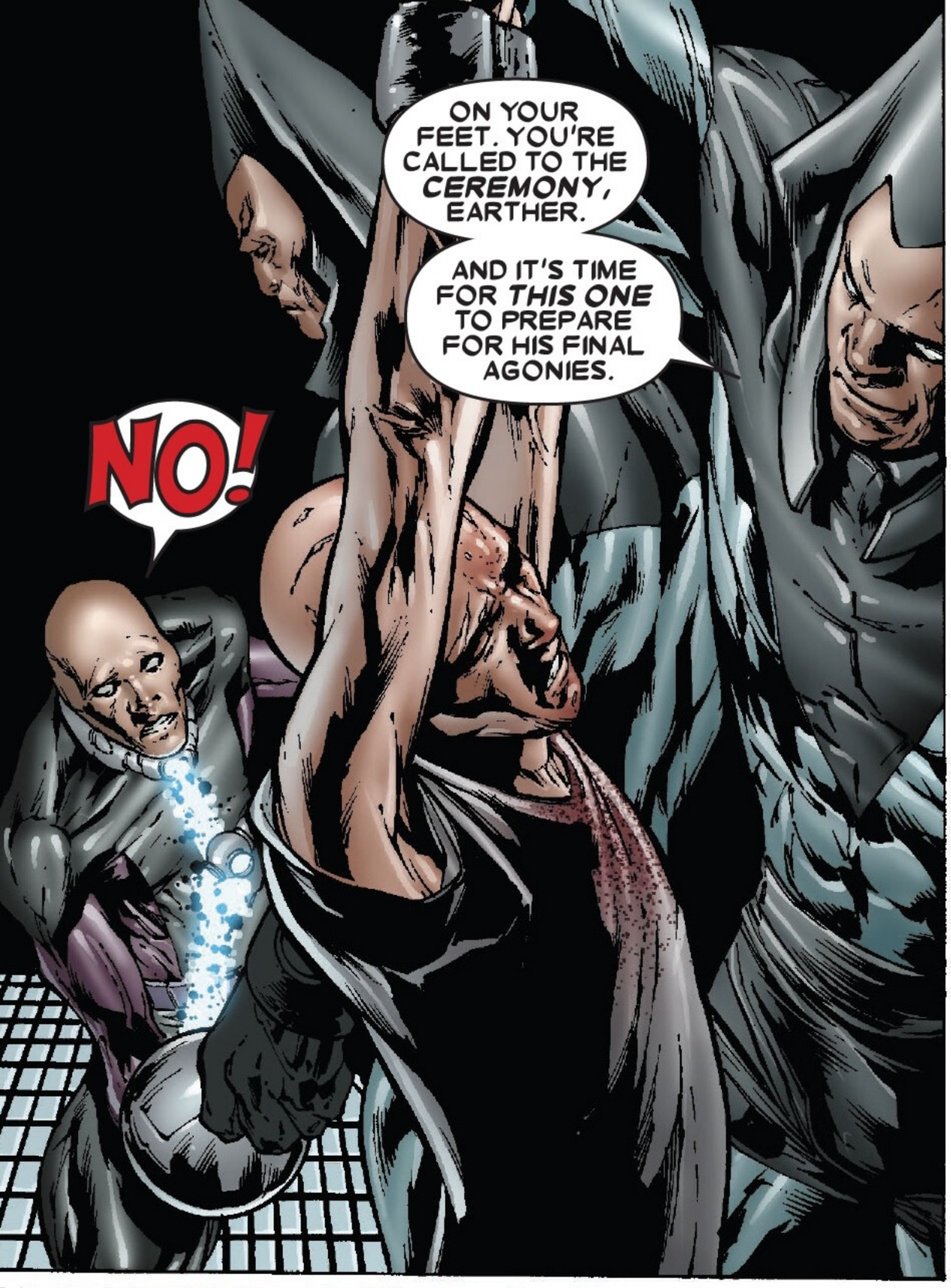
AND YOU HAVE TO HELP ME FIGURE A WAY TO *SAVE YOU*.

NO... THIS IS...A TRAP.

THEY'RE USING ME TO LURE... LILANDRA...

DON'T SAVE ME... DON'T LET HER DIE FOR ME...

BUT...I HAVE TO... I...


ON YOUR FEET. YOU'RE CALLED TO THE *CEREMONY*, EARTHER.
AND IT'S TIME FOR *THIS ONE* TO PREPARE FOR HIS FINAL AGONIES.
NO!

OUT OF THE WAY!
DON'T YOU *TOUCH HIM!*

SMAK

IF *LORD VULCAN* HADN'T ORDERED US TO TREAT YOU AS HIS *FRIEND*, YOU'D FACE MY BLADE RIGHT NOW, *FREAKLING*.

NOW GET TO THE *WEDDING*, BEFORE HE CHANGES HIS MIND!
AHH!

CAN YOU FREAKIN' BELIEVE THIS $#@%?
IT'S LIKE THEY'RE CHARLES AND LADY DI OUT HERE OR SOMETHING.
LADY *DEATH*, I THINK YOU MEAN TO SAY.
YEAH, HEPZIBAH...I GUESS THAT ABOUT FITS.
--AND IN THE GRAND TRADITIONS OF THE AERIE BEFORE US, UPHOLDING THE LAWS OF OUR PEOPLE...
I AM GLAD I CHOSE TO PILOT YOUR X-BUG. *CORSAIR*, WATCHING THIS, MUST BE AGONY.
HIS SON, JOINING SHI'AR ROYAL FAMILY... *HSSS.*

BORN IN THE THRONE ROOM, BLOOD-PROVEN IN BATTLE...

...PRINCE VULCAN I NAME YOU NOW, AND CALL YOU BROTHER.

GOD PROTECT US ALL.

--AND LET THEIR *PRAISES* BE SUNG THIS NIGHT THROUGHOUT THE IMPERIUM, FOR PRINCE VULCAN AND PRINCESS CAL'SYEE NERAMANI HAVE BEEN *JOINED TOGETHER*...

...NOW AND UNTIL THE *STARS GO OUT!*

MY LORD... LOOK TO THE SKIES.

YOUR *OTHER* SISTER JOINS THE PARTY.

TO ARMS!

PREPARE FOR BATTLE!

WHAT--? THEY'RE HERE *ALREADY?* BUT... WHAT ABOUT *XAVIER?*

WE HAVEN'T MADE HIM *PAY* YET!

IT'S TOO SOON!

IT'S *NEVER* TOO SOON FOR BATTLE. WATCH AND LEARN, LITTLE PRINCE.

FIRE ALL WEAPONS! TAKE THEM OUT OF THE SKY!
KEEP THEM BUSY! WE NEED TO BUY NIGHTCRAWLER SOME TIME!
THEY'RE BUSY! BUT WATCH OUT FOR GLADIATOR!
FRAAAAH!
GIVE IT ALL YOU'VE GOT, LORNA! WE CAN'T REALLY HURT HIM!
GAAAA!
BAMF
PROFESSOR! IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY!
NOOO!

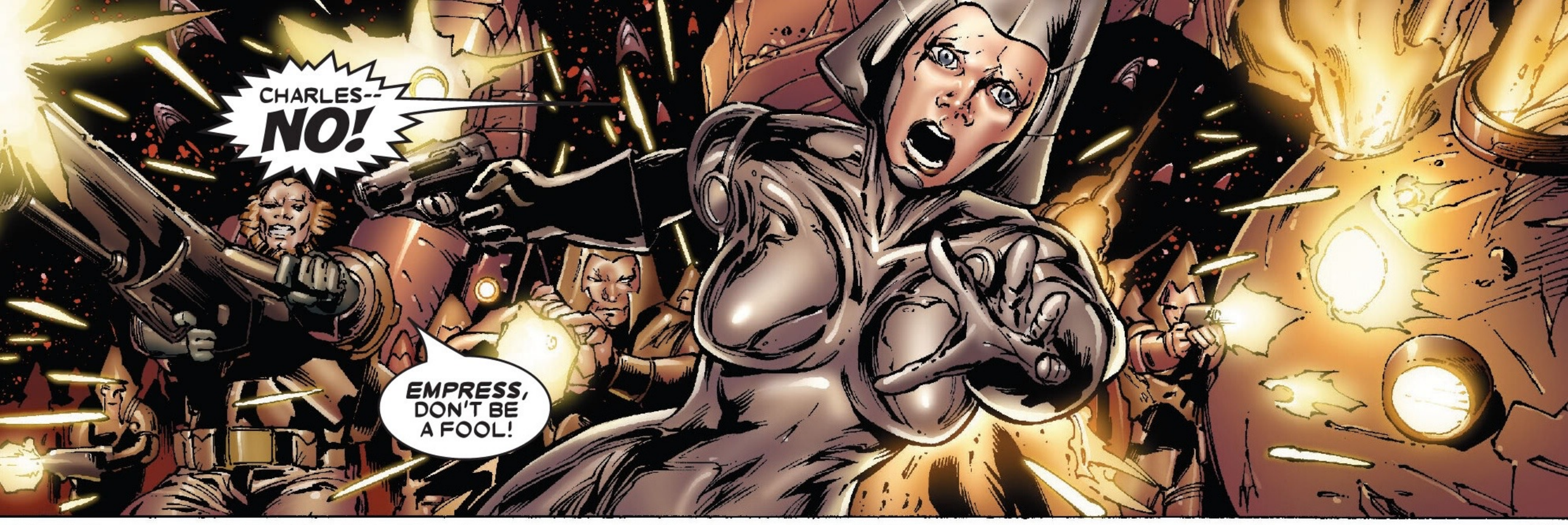
YOU DON'T SAVE HIM!
NO ONE SAVES HIM!
YEEAAAA!

BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE HAPPENS TODAY, PROFESSOR X PAYS!

GABRIEL! DON'T DO THIS! YOU'RE BETTER THAN--

AHHH!

HE GETS WHAT HE DESERVES...


CHARLES--
NO!
EMPRESS, DON'T BE A FOOL!

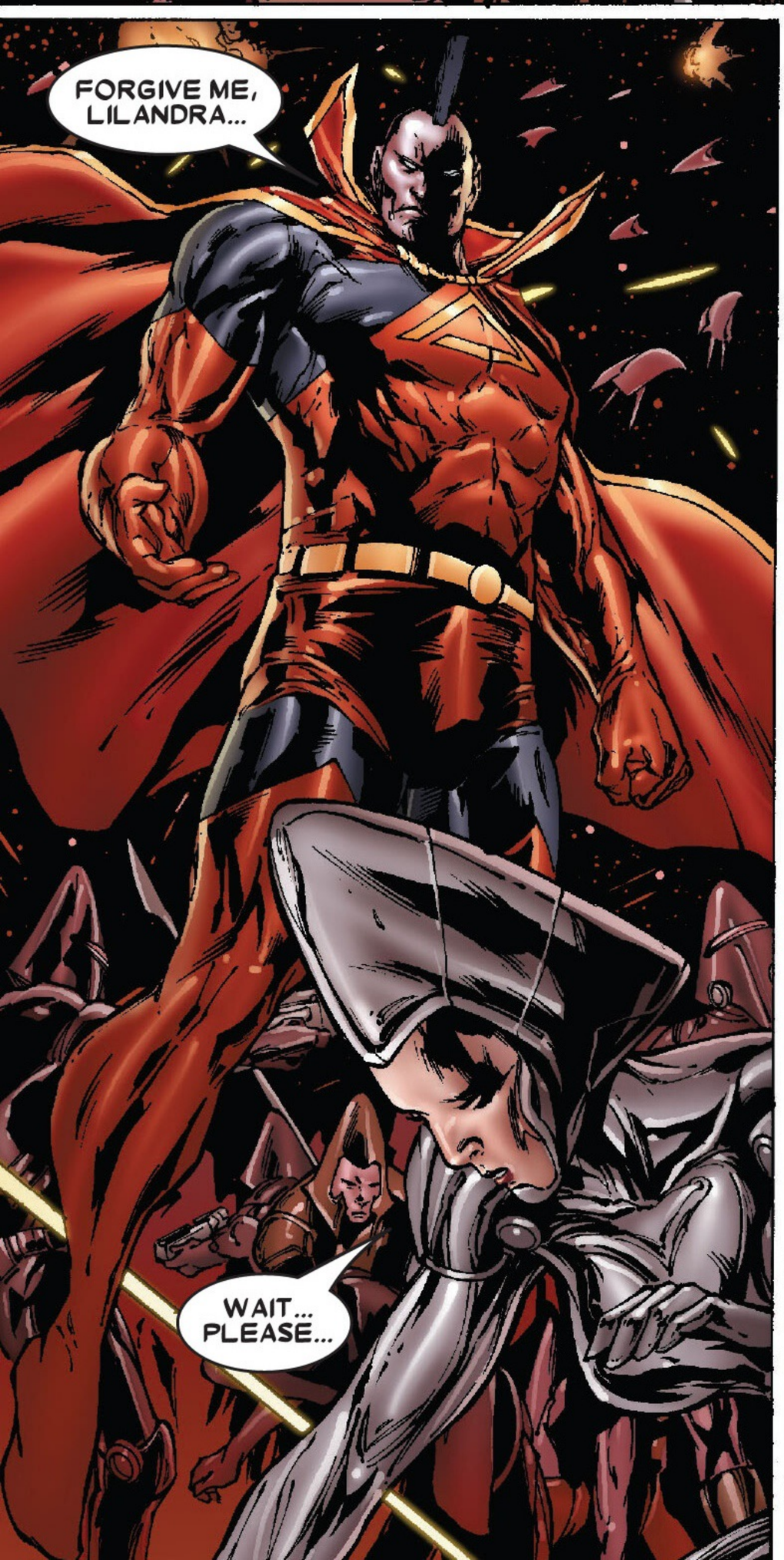
I'VE GOT HER.
NO! WE MUST SAVE CHARLES!

IMPERIAL GUARD--BRING MY LITTLE SISTER TO ME!

YIIIAAAAAHHH!
I CAN'T HOLD HIM!

WUUHH!
HEY!

KRAK


FORGIVE ME, LILANDRA...
WAIT... PLEASE...

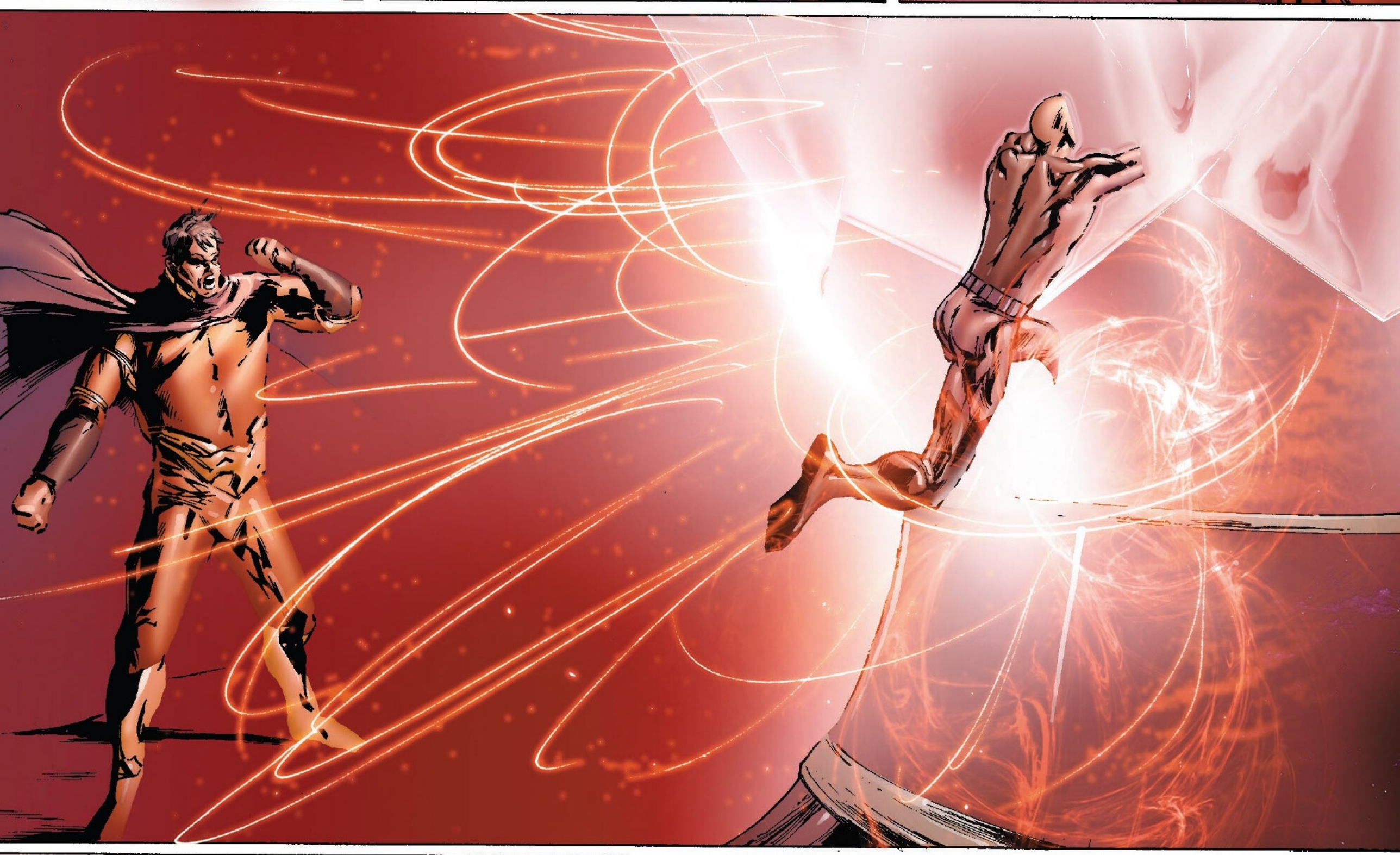
THIS IS WHAT YOU GET, OLD MAN!
...GABRIEL... DON'T... DON'T...
NOW I TRAP YOU IN A ROCK!

NOOOO!
GOOD GOD... WHAT SORT OF MONSTER DID THEY TURN MY BOY INTO...?

...WHAT...?

OH NO...

YOU STUPID JERK!
HEY--



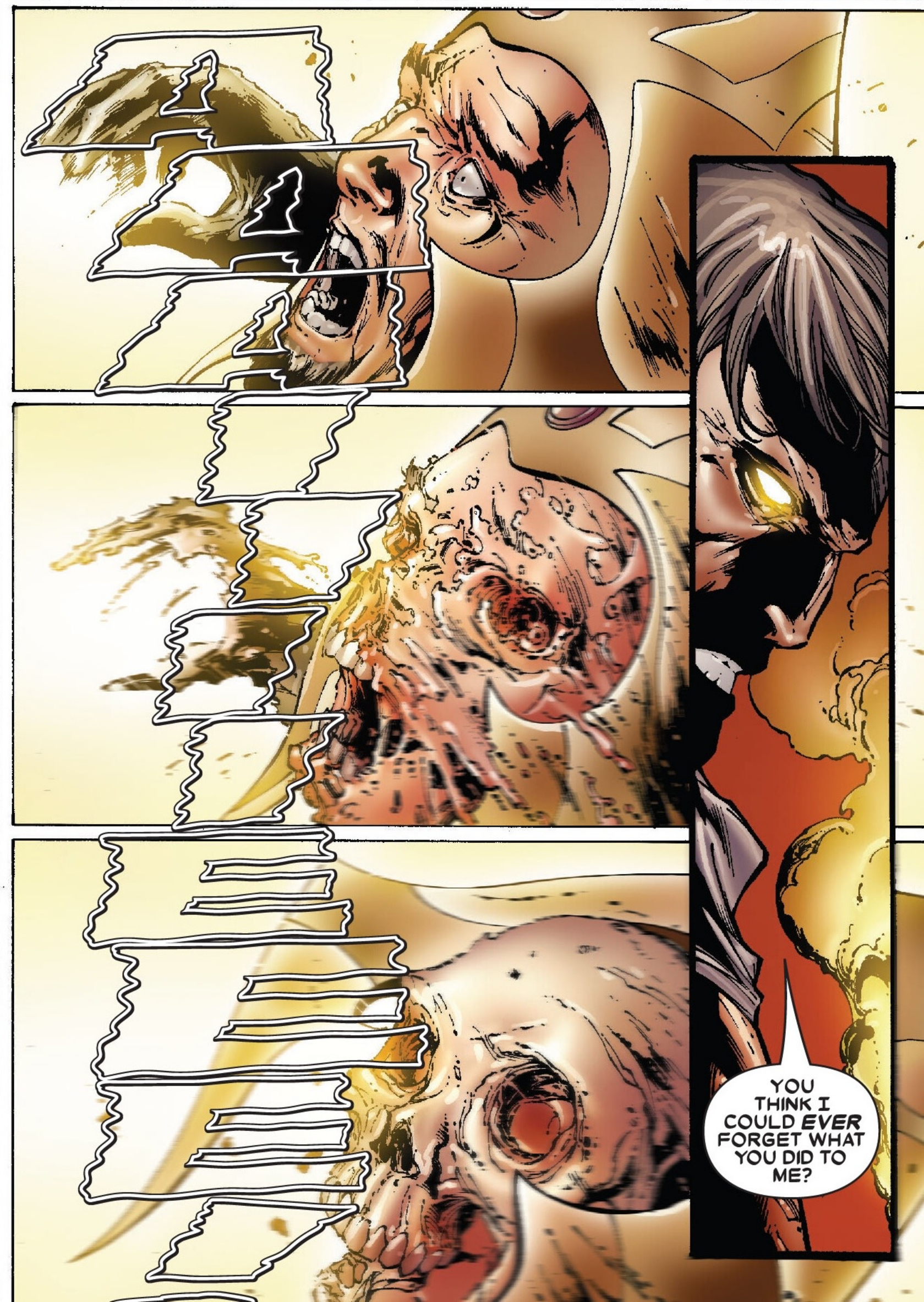
FINE. THEN YOU CAN DIE, TOO, DARWIN.
I DON'T NEED YOU FOR MY PLANS ANYWAY...

ALEX, WAIT! HE'S TOO POWERFUL.
I DON'T CARE. WE HAVE TO TAKE HIM-- WHATEVER THE COST!
CLEAR A PATH, CHODD-- NOW! GET ME TO MY SON!
DOING MY BEST, CORSAIR.
NO! GET TO LILANDRA! THE PROFESSOR AND DARWIN ARE LOST!
HER, WE CAN STILL SAVE!
SISTER, SISTER, SISTER...IT'S BEEN TOO LONG SINCE I'VE SEEN YOUR FACE IN AGONY...
VULTURE! CARRION PREY!

COMING FROM YOUR LIPS, EVEN THOSE WORDS SOUND LIKE "EMPEROR."
MY ONLY DILEMMA, LITTLE SISTER, IS...DO I KILL YOU NOW, OR LET YOU WITNESS MY VICTORY FIRST?

YEEEIIIHHHH!
ACTUALLY... THAT WOULD BE MY VICTORY, YOU MOTHER-KILLING BASTARD!

YOU THINK I WOULD BE YOUR BROTHER?!
THAT I WOULD SERVE BENEATH YOU?!


YOU THINK I COULD EVER FORGET WHAT YOU DID TO ME?

CRAZY BOY *KILL* EMPEROR?
AYE, AND WORSE THAN *THAT*, I FEAR...

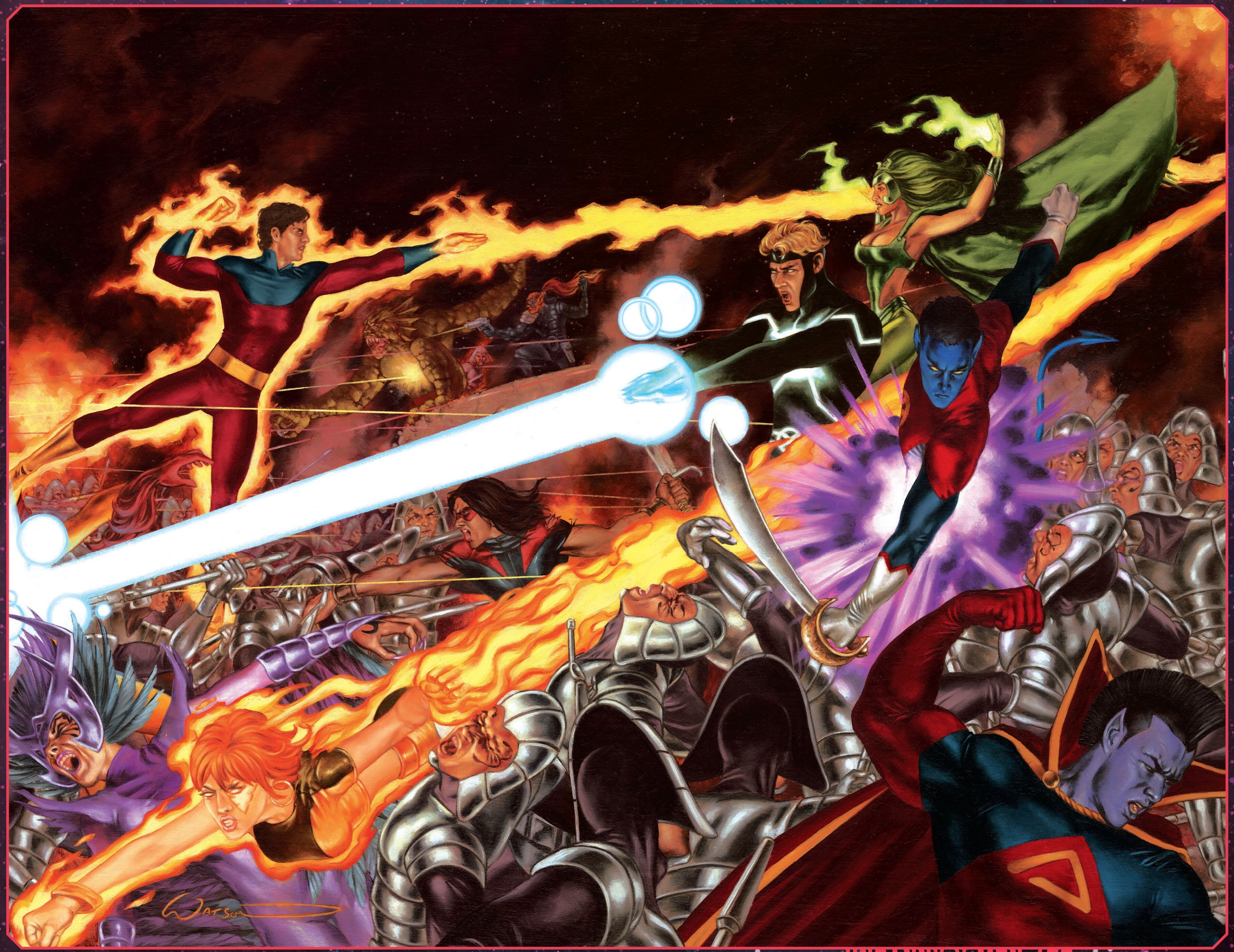
WHAT THE HELL DID HE JUST DO?

WHAT...?
VULCAN... NO...I *TRUSTED* YOU...

AND I HEARD YOUR WISHES, CAL'SYEE... AND *RESPECTED* THEM.
YOU DIDN'T WANT TO *RULE*. NOW THAT WE'RE *MARRIED*, YOU WON'T HAVE TO.

BECAUSE I CLAIM D'KEN'S *THRONE* AS MY OWN!
BY RIGHT OF BLOOD AND *COMBAT!* BY RIGHT OF *SUCCESSION!*
I NAME MYSELF *EMPEROR VULCAN*, RULER OF THE *SHI'AR IMPERIUM!*

War of Kings #2 variant by OLIVIER COIPEL & MARK MORALES



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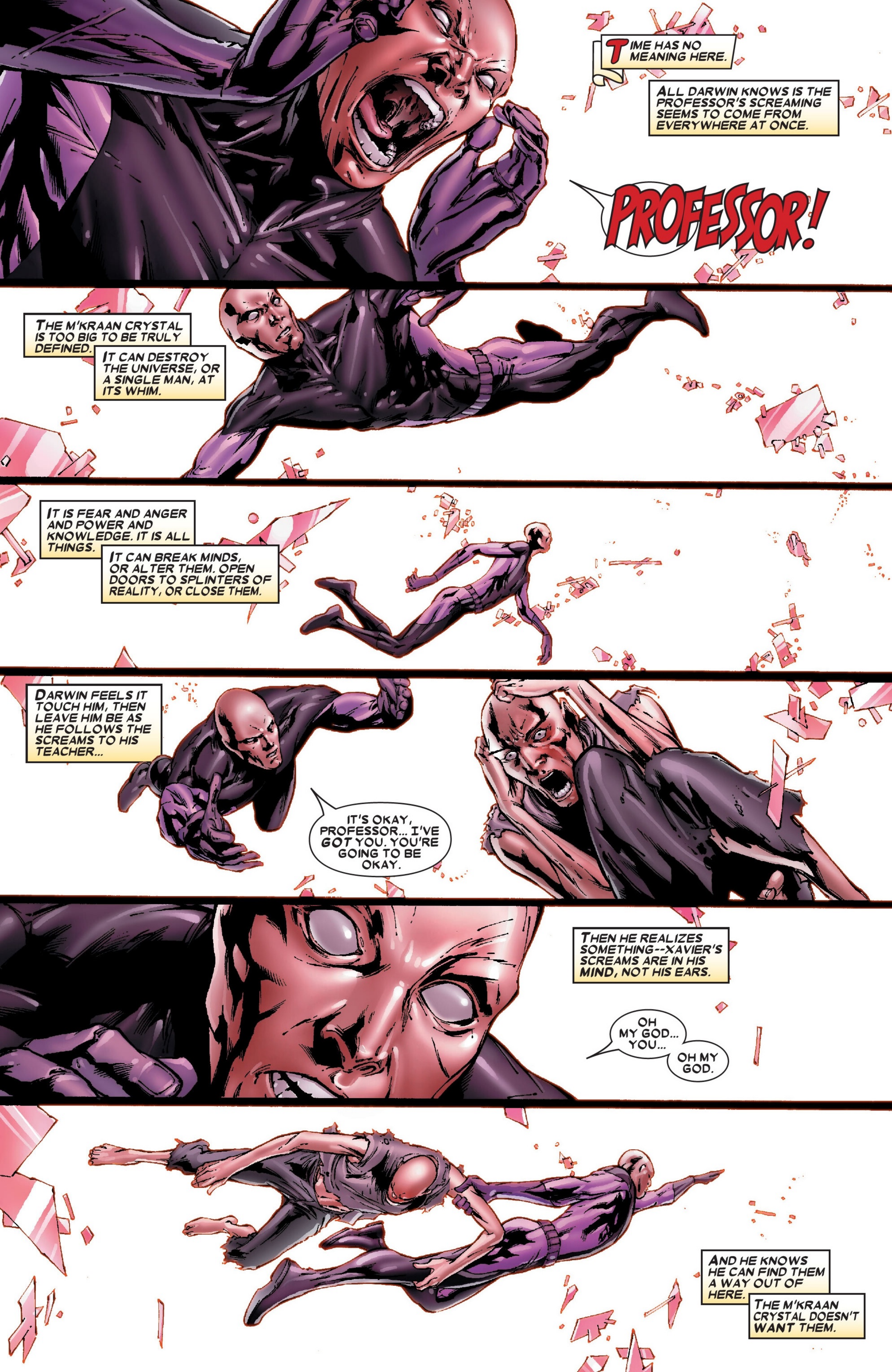

TIME HAS NO MEANING HERE.
ALL DARWIN KNOWS IS THE PROFESSOR'S SCREAMING SEEMS TO COME FROM EVERYWHERE AT ONCE.
PROFESSOR!
THE M'KRAAN CRYSTAL IS TOO BIG TO BE TRULY DEFINED.
IT CAN DESTROY THE UNIVERSE, OR A SINGLE MAN, AT ITS WHIM.
IT IS FEAR AND ANGER AND POWER AND KNOWLEDGE. IT IS ALL THINGS.
IT CAN BREAK MINDS, OR ALTER THEM. OPEN DOORS TO SPLINTERS OF REALITY, OR CLOSE THEM.
DARWIN FEELS IT TOUCH HIM, THEN LEAVE HIM BE AS HE FOLLOWS THE SCREAMS TO HIS TEACHER...
IT'S OKAY, PROFESSOR... I'VE GOT YOU. YOU'RE GOING TO BE OKAY.
THEN HE REALIZES SOMETHING--XAVIER'S SCREAMS ARE IN HIS MIND, NOT HIS EARS.
OH MY GOD... YOU...
OH MY GOD.
AND HE KNOWS HE CAN FIND THEM A WAY OUT OF HERE.
THE M'KRAAN CRYSTAL DOESN'T WANT THEM.

AND MY FIRST ACT AS EMPEROR IS TO SECURE MY THRONE FROM THREAT...
...NO...YOU CAN'T--YOU'RE MAD...
HAVEN'T YOU LEARNED BY NOW, LILANDRA, THAT YOUR PEOPLE PREFER A MAD EMPEROR?
THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SHI'AR EMPIRE CHAPTER TWELVE:
ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

YOUR WAYS ARE DONE. IT'S TIME FOR THE RETURN OF CONQUEST...OF EXPANSION...

OF WRATH!

NO!

TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF HER!

UNH!

LEAVE HER ALONE, AND LISTEN TO ME--YOU LITTLE FOOL!

YOU LISTEN TO YOUR FATHER!

FATHER? YOU MEAN YOU, CORSAIR?

NO.

YOU'RE JUST THE MAN WHO WAS TOO WEAK TO SAVE ME OR MY MOTHER...

...I HAVE NO FATHER!
AAAIIIEEE!
DAD!
NOOOO!

...CHRISTOPHER...

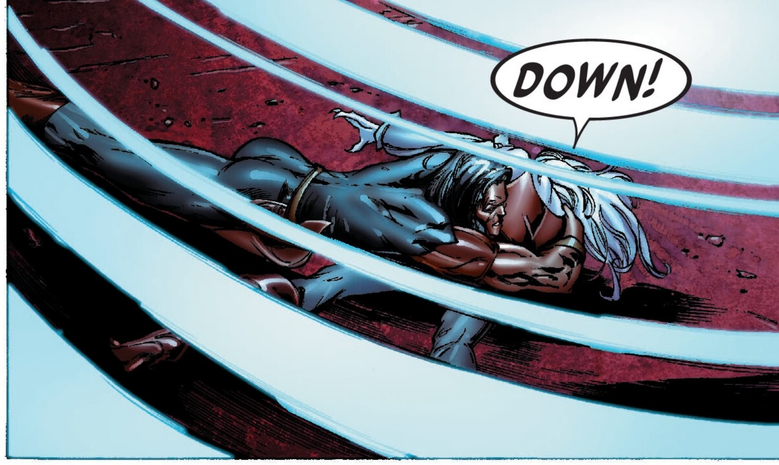
NO...

AND NOW, ALEX...NEITHER DO YOU.
YAAAA!

YOU BASTARD! YOU FREAKING BASTARD!

CH'OD...WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING BEFORE HE KILLS ALEX, TOO.
DISTRACT HIM.
I...THINK THAT'S BEING DONE FOR US...

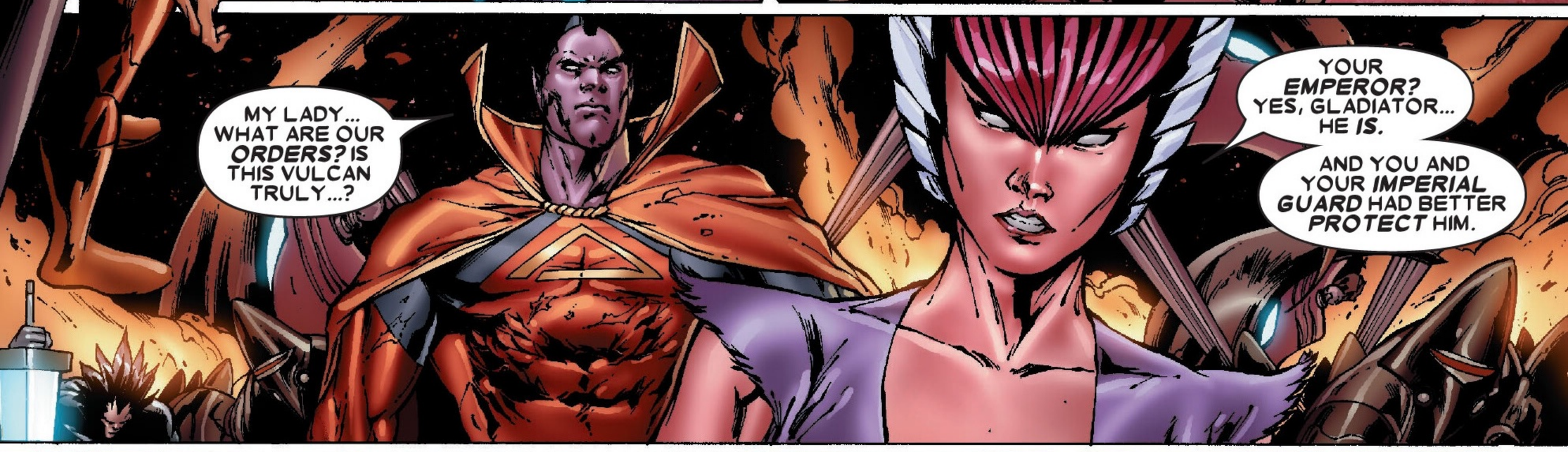
DIE! DIE, YOU SICK--
PHHT. NOT LIKELY.
YOU'RE NOT EVEN WORTH MY FULL ATTENTION.


DOWN!

DON'T BE AN IDIOT, HEPZIBAH!
LET GO! LET ME--
YOU CAN'T TAKE HIM!
I DO NOT CARE!

GET IT THROUGH YOUR *HEAD*, BIG BROTHER... YOU *CAN'T* HURT ME.

...NO... IT'S ALL LOST...


MY LADY... WHAT ARE OUR *ORDERS?* IS THIS VULCAN TRULY...?
YOUR *EMPEROR?* YES, GLADIATOR... HE *IS.*
AND YOU AND YOUR *IMPERIAL GUARD* HAD BETTER *PROTECT* HIM.

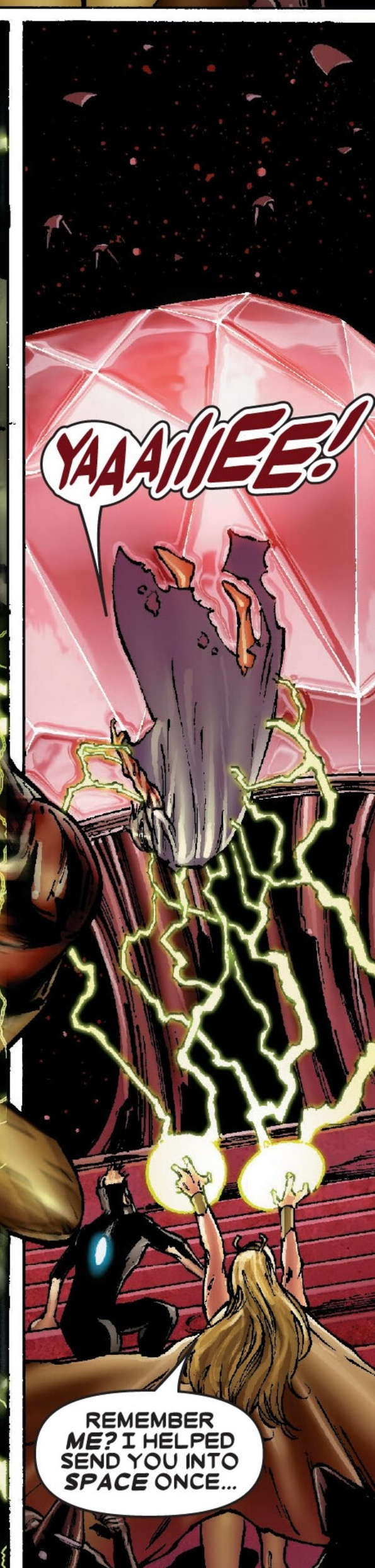
RRRAAAAA!
UHHT!

NOW YOU DIE LIKE YOUR BROTHER, WITCH!
AHHH!
DEATHBIRD!
UNHH!
I'M GOING TO ROAST YOUR FLESH!
NOT THIS TIME, JERK.
RACHEL...
I'VE GOT THIS...
MOLECULAR TELEKINESIS... MOVED THE ATMOSPHERE AROUND HIS ENERGY.

LORNA, NOW. WHILE HE'S FOCUSED ON RACHEL...
HIS ARMOR. YOU CAN TAKE HIM DOWN.
I INTEND TO...

...ASSUMING HE'S GOT A HEART TO CRUSH!

AAAHHGG!


YAAAIIIEE!
REMEMBER ME? I HELPED SEND YOU INTO SPACE ONCE...

MAYBE I CAN'T TOUCH YOU WITH MY *POWERS*, BUT THAT *DOESN'T* MEAN I CAN'T *HURT YOU!*

KRAK

CHARLES... TELL ME HE'S *ALIVE.*

THEY *BOTH* ARE, THOUGH IN *NO SHAPE* FOR BATTLE.

WE NEED TO *GET* THEM UP TO YOUR *SHIP.*

I KNOW...

...I'LL BE RIGHT BACK WITH *HELP.*

BAMF

KEEP ON HIM, LORNA... HE'S HURTING...

AAAHHH!

LEAVE ME ALONE!

ALEX!

OH, GOD... ALEX...

I'M OKAY... ABSORBED MOST OF IT...

DON'T WORRY... ABOUT ME...

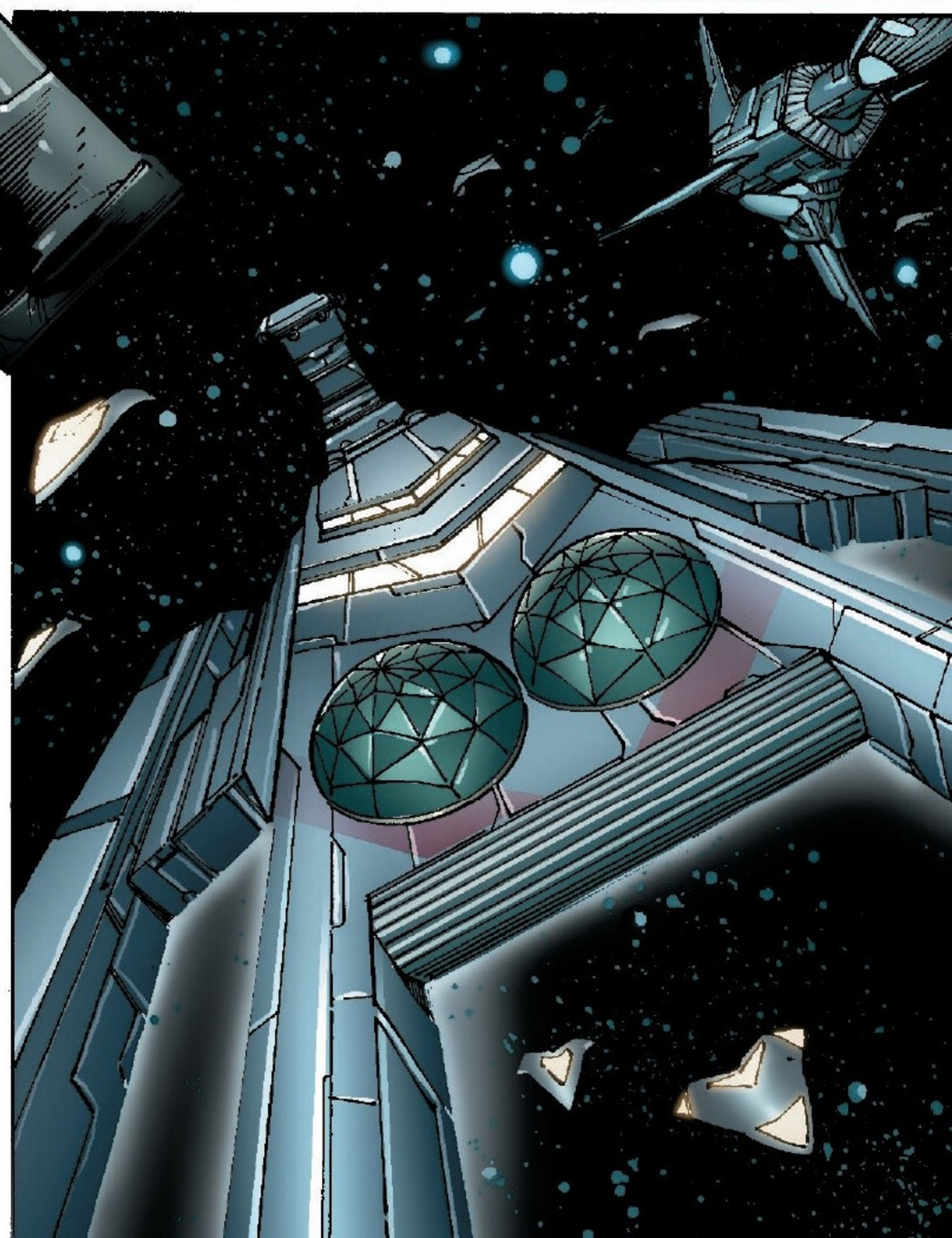
HIS VITAL SIGNS ARE STABLE...OTHER THAN THAT I CAN'T SAY.
OH CHARLES... OH THANK ALL THAT IS HOLY...
DARWIN SEEMS IN FAIR SHAPE, TOO.
GOOD, BECAUSE HEPZIBAH'S GONNA BE DONE RAIDING THE WEAPONS LOCKER SOON, AND SHE'S NOT GONNA WANT TO WAIT AROUND.
SHE'S GOT BLOOD ON HER MIND.
WILL YOU STAY WITH THEM, LILANDRA?
I'M SORRY, MY FRIENDS...BUT NOW THAT I KNOW CHARLES IS SAFE, MY PLACE IS WITH MY PEOPLE...
...WHILE YOURS IS FAR FROM THIS NIGHTMARE.
FORGIVE ME.

SHE ACTIVATED HER TELEPORTATION NODE. WENT BACK TO THE BATTLE.
THEN WE NEED TO FOLLOW HER. NOW.

WE CANNOT...SHE DID SOMETHING TO THE SHIP'S COMPUTER. IT WON'T DROP ITS SHIELDS TO LET US. WHAT DID SHE...
YOU TWO--

--BETTER EXPLAIN WHY JUMP ENGINES COUNTING DOWN!

OH $#@%...
...SHE'S TRYING TO SAVE THE PROFESSOR.
SHUT ENGINES DOWN!
I CAN'T. SHE LOCKED THE CONTROLS...



WITCH!
AAAAHH!
COME, MY EMPEROR... WE MUST GO.
NO... CAN STILL... FIGHT...
...KILL THEM ALL... KILL...
YOUR RIBS ARE CRUSHING YOUR LUNGS...YOU'LL DIE...
LET'S LIVE TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY.

IMPERIAL GUARD! WITHDRAW!
WE LEAVE THIS PLACE!

NOO!

IMPERIAL GUARD! YOU HEARD THE ORDER!

FOLLOW YOUR EMPRESS!

THEY FLEE...
BECAUSE THEY'RE *COWARDS!*

NAY... LIKE MOST HERE, THEY WERE BUT *SOLDIERS...*
WITH NO TRUE CAUSE OF THEIR OWN.

LILANDRA! I THOUGHT WE'D *LOST* YOU!
NOT AS YET... BUT I THOUGHT *WE'D* LOST EVERYTHING...
DID WE ACTUALLY *WIN* THIS?

NO...WE HELD THEM OFF.
THE *EARTHER'S* MOVE AGAINST D'KEN DESTROYED THEIR *MOMENTUM...*

SEE HOW THEY *RUN?* BUT THEY'LL *REGROUP*...YOUR SISTER KNOWS ENOUGH TO KNOW THIS ISN'T OVER.

THIS IS JUST THE *FIRST* BATTLE. AND OUR VICTORY WAS FAR FROM CLEAN...

...DAD... OH GOD... DAD...

HEY...I THINK WE HAVE *ANOTHER* PROBLEM.

WHERE THE HELL IS THE *X-BUG?*

EARTH
WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON? WHAT'S WRONG?!
DAMNED BIRD EMPRESS SET SHIP TO JUMP INTO ATMOSPHERE!
WE GOING DOWN!

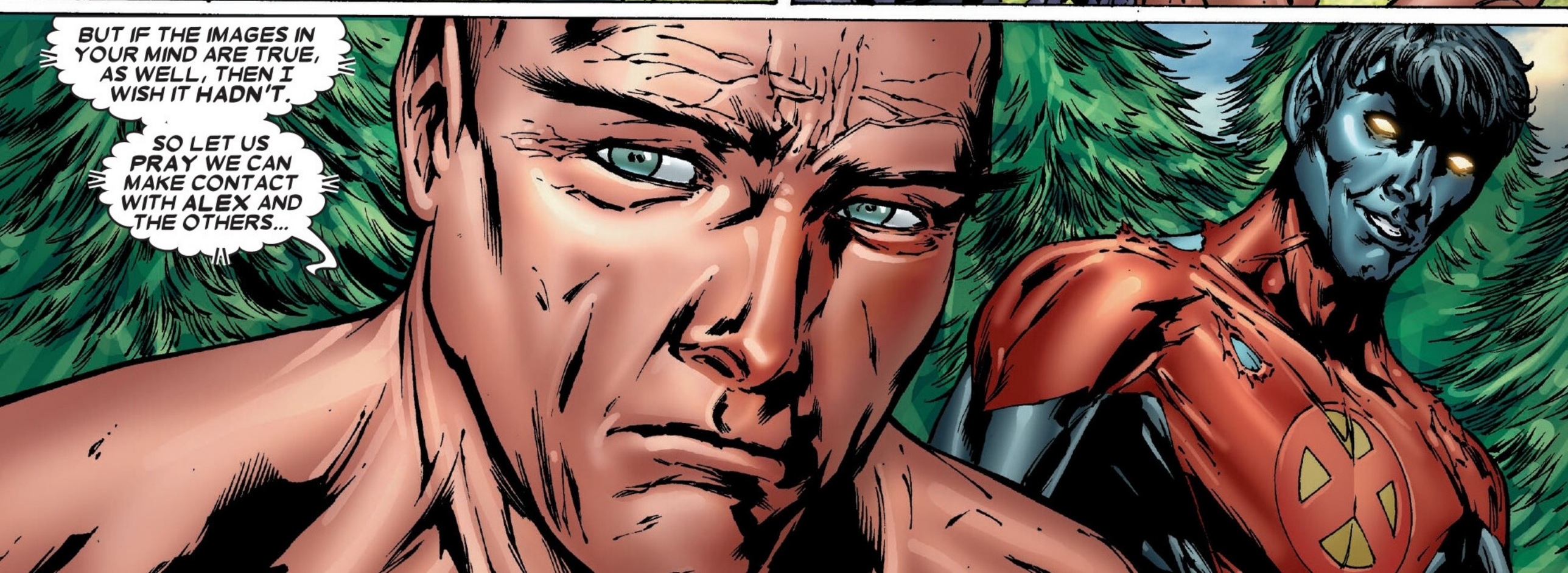
BAMF
BAMF
WE NEED TO GET AWAY FROM HERE, NOW...MOVE.
BAMF

THAT WAS MY WAY HOME... I'M STUCK ON YOUR WORLD.
THEY'LL *COME* FOR YOU.
THE STARJAMMERS WILL.

WHAT IS POINT...?
THERE IS *NOTHING* FOR ME BACK THERE... NOT NOW.

PROFESSOR? ARE YOU *UNHARMED?*
I'M BETTER THAN I'VE BEEN IN A LONG TIME...AT LEAST *PHYSICALLY.*

HE'S GOT HIS *MUTATION* BACK. THE M'KRAAN CRYSTAL *FIXED* HIM.
WHAT?
IT'S TRUE, KURT...


BUT IF THE IMAGES IN YOUR MIND ARE TRUE, AS WELL, THEN I WISH IT HADN'T.
SO LET US PRAY WE CAN MAKE CONTACT WITH ALEX AND THE OTHERS...

YOU'RE SURE THIS IS *OKAY?* THIS UNINHABITED LITTLE PLANET?

CORSAIR AND HEPZIBAH *OFTEN* STAYED ON THIS ROCK. ROUGHING IT, THE MAN CALLED IT.

HE'D FANCY TA TAKE HIS *FINAL REST* HERE.

OKAY THEN...I GUESS WE'VE GOT A DECISION TO MAKE.

DO WE FOLLOW THE OTHERS HOME... OR DO WE STAY AND FIGHT?

IT'S UP TO YOU, ALEX.

NO, IT'S NOT. IT *CAN'T* BE MY DECISION.

BUT IT *IS*...

LORNA'S *RIGHT*, HAVOK... YOU'RE THE *LEADER* OF THIS RAGTAG BAND NOW.

WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT.

I CAN THINK OF NO BETTER MAN FOR THE JOB.

BUT YOUR FATHER CAST A SHADOW THAT WILL BE HARD TO MEASURE UP TO...

RIGHT...

THEN WE *STAY*... AND BRING MY LITTLE BROTHER THE *JUSTICE* HE DESERVES.

TWO DAYS LATER...

I HOPE YOU'LL ALL UNDERSTAND, ESPECIALLY SCOTT AND THE PROFESSOR... BUT OUR JOB OUT HERE ISN'T DONE.

SO WE'RE GOING TO STAY AND FIGHT TO RESTORE LILANDRA TO THE THRONE.

MY GOD... WHEN DID THIS ARRIVE?

SOMETIME LATE LAST NIGHT. AND ALEX ISN'T ANSWERING ANY REPLIES.

WE'RE GOING TO LEAD THE RESISTANCE AGAINST VULCAN AND DEATHBIRD.

BECAUSE WE HAVE TO END THIS THREAT... HE HAS TO DIE.

AND X-MEN DON'T KILL, SO I GUESS WE AREN'T X-MEN ANYMORE.

WE'RE WHAT MY BROTHER TURNED US INTO.
IF WE SUCCEED, WE'LL SEE YOU ALL AGAIN...HOPEFULLY SOON.

BUT IF WE FAIL, YOU HAVE TO SEND SOMEONE ELSE TO STOP VULCAN...
BECAUSE HE'S CRAZY. HE'S A WARPED CHILD...

...AND IF WE FALL, I TRULY BELIEVE THE SHI'AR ARMADA WILL HEAD FOR EARTH.

War of Kings #3 variant by PAUL PELLETIER

X-MEN: EMPEROR VULCAN 1

EVEN AFTER A MILLENNIUM...
...I CAN STILL HEAR THE SCREAMS.
ELDEST...
...THERE IS A DEVELOPMENT.
THE SHI'AR.
THEN THE TIME HAS COME, BROTHER.

SHI'AR SPACE. WEEKS LATER.

THE SUPPLY LINE TO THE FOURTH SHI'AR FLEET.

"CAPTAIN? FORGIVE ME... BUT SOMETHING IS NOT RIGHT."

"REPORT."

"THE LONG-RANGE SENSORS, THEY DO NOT MAKE SENSE...THERE IS AN ANOMALY."

THERE'S A STRONG ELECTROMAGNETIC FIELD, BUT I CANNOT DETECT THE SOURCE...IT IS EVERYWHERE.

ELECTROMAGNETIC...

GODS PRESERVE.

IT'S A TRAP! ALL WARBIRDS, GO TO CONDITION BLACK!!

"THE STARJAMMERS ARE HERE!"

ATTENTION, SHI'AR WARBIRDS. YOU WOULD BE WISE TO SURRENDER NOW.

NEVER!

HRM. CH'OD SHALL PUT YOU IN THE "NOT WISE" CATEGORY, THEN.

SHMMMM!!
STARJAMMERS!!
TAKE THEM DOWN.
KILL THEM!!

ALEX SUMMERS
ALSO KNOWN AS HAVOK.
REMEMBER, WE NEED THE CAPTAIN ALIVE!
LORNA DANE
ALSO KNOWN AS POLARIS.
I'M PRETTY SURE HE WAS TALKING TO YOU, RACHEL. I STOPPED BEING CRAZY MONTHS AGO.
RACHEL GREY
ALSO KNOWN AS MARVEL GIRL.
AAARGHH!
I'LL DO MY BEST. NO PROMISES.
KORVUS ROOK'SHIR
WIELDER OF THE BLADE OF THE PHOENIX.
YOU X-MEN TALK FAR TOO MUCH IN BATTLE.

NO... NO!!
DO NOT LET THEM TAKE THE SHIP!
ACTIVATE THE SELF-DEST--
AH, AH, AH...

YE MAY WISH TO THINK ABOUT THAT, LAD.

THE BRIDGE IS SECURE. OPEN THE COMM CHANNEL.
TAKING MY SHIP WILL GET YOU NOTHING! THERE ARE ELEVEN MORE WARBIRDS GUARDING THE SUPPLY LINE, AND YOUR ONE SHIP CAN'T STAND AGAINST THEM.
YOU ARE CORRECT, CAPTAIN.

BUT THE STARJAMMER IS NOT ALONE.
BY THE STARS... GENERAL KA'ARDUM... EMPRESS... YOU LIVE...
NOW, CAPTAIN... LET'S DISCUSS YOU AND YOUR REGIMENT JOINING THE RESISTANCE.

"LET'S DISCUSS EMPEROR VULCAN."

DEATH TO THE FALSE EMPEROR!!
DEATH TO VUL--
WE'LL HAVE TO START OVER.
I COULDN'T HEAR OVER THE SCREAMING.
GABRIEL SUMMERS, ALSO KNOWN AS...
EMPEROR VULCAN

CHANDILAR, THRONE WORLD OF THE SHI'AR EMPIRE.

DID YOU JUST SAY THAT I WASN'T LOVED BY THE SHI'AR PEOPLE, ARAKI?

MY...MY LORD VULCAN, I...

I WOULD NOT DISHONOR YOU BY ATTEMPTING TO DECEIVE YOU, EVEN IF IT MEANT MY LIFE.

THE SHI'AR EMPIRE IS TEARING ITSELF APART.

THE RESISTANCE TO YOUR RULE IS STRONG. YOUR... ELIMINATION OF FORMER EMPEROR D'KEN HAS DIVIDED THE PEOPLE, AND WITH LILANDRA AND MAJOR GENERAL KA'ARDUM WORKING WITH THE RESISTANCE, MORE AND MORE OF THE MILITARY ARE DEFECTING.

THEY LACK HONOR.

KALLARK

ALSO KNOWN AS GLADIATOR.

PRAETOR OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD.

YOU SAID I WAS NOT LOVED BY MY PEOPLE.

TELL ME THE TRUTH.
...
ONLY THE PRESENCE OF A MEMBER OF THE NERAMANI BLOODLINE AS ROYAL CONSORT IS HOLDING THE REMAINING SUPPORTERS IN PLACE.
CAL'SYEE NERAMANI
ALSO KNOWN AS DEATHBIRD.
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT, MY WIFE?
AAAHH!!
SHRIPPP
I THINK THE CHANCELLOR IS A POLITICIAN WHO LIKES TO PLAY MIND GAMES.
BUT HE WOULD DO WELL TO REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE EMPEROR NOW, WHETHER THE SECRET ORDER LIKES IT OR NOT.
NOW...I WANT TO HEAR ABOUT MY BROTHER. I WANT TO HEAR ABOUT HAVOK AND THE STARJAMMERS.
WHY AREN'T THEY DEAD YET?

THE CLENCH WORLDS, NEAR SHI'AR SPACE.

"WE'VE CAPTURED THREE SUPPLY LINES, AND HAVE CONVINCED A GOOD PORTION OF THE SOLDIERS GUARDING THEM TO JOIN THE RESISTANCE."

WITHOUT RESOURCES AND SUPPLIES, THE EMPIRE'S WAR EFFORT WILL BE WEAKENED, HARDER TO SUSTAIN.

THE GAP IS CLOSING.

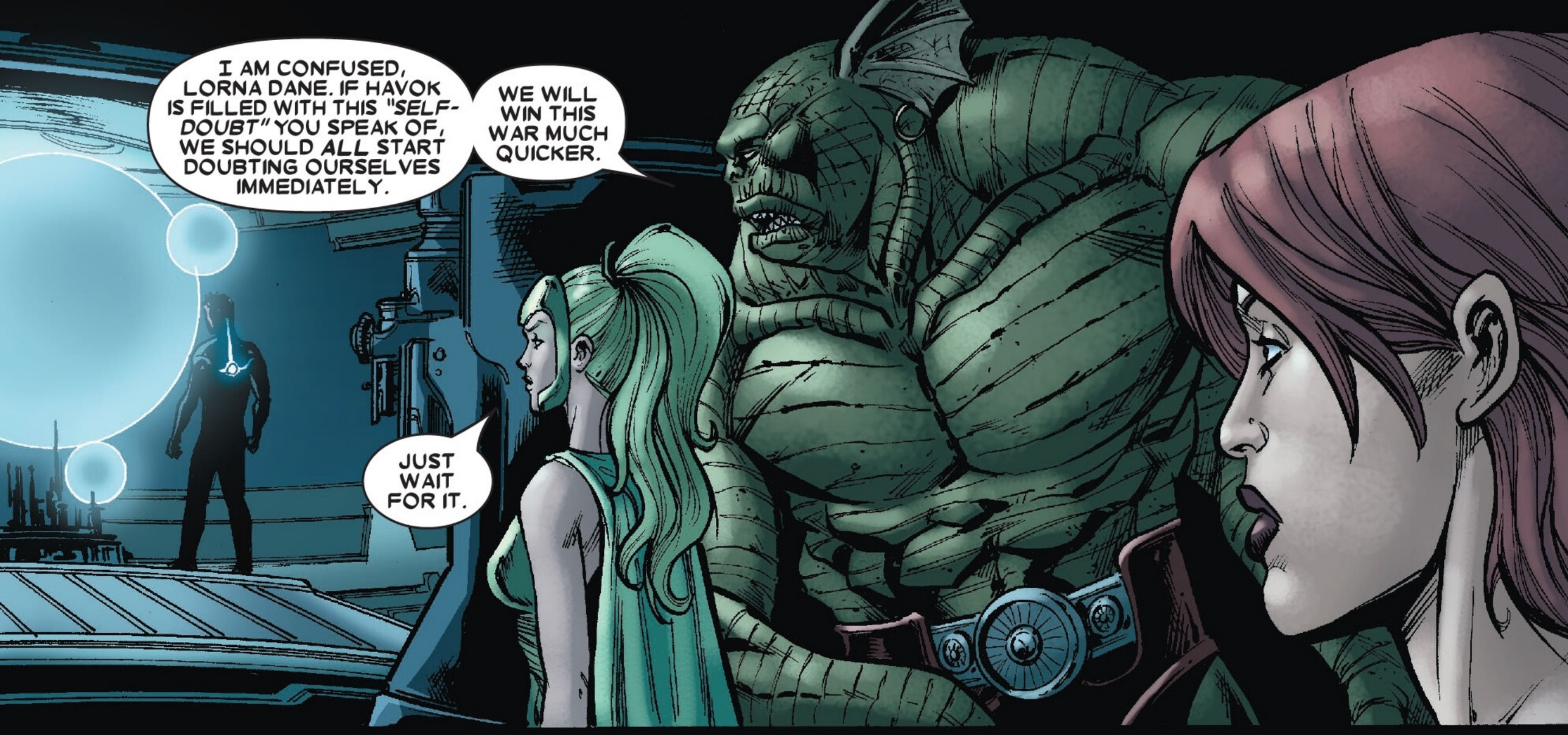
THIS IS FEATHER'S EDGE.

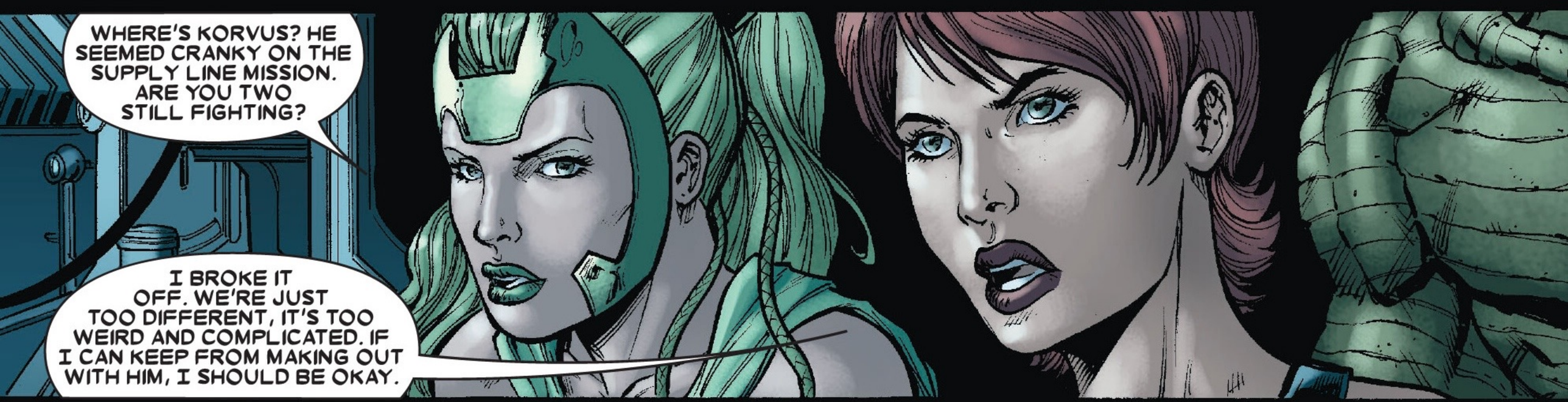
IT'S DEFENDED BY A SERIES OF ARMAGEDDON-CLASS KILLSTATIONS. IT'S NOT GOING TO BE PRETTY, BUT CUTTING OFF FEATHER'S EDGE WILL WEAKEN VULCAN'S FORCES TO A BREAKING POINT.

WE'VE AVOIDED AMASSING YOUR ARMADA UNTIL NOW, MAJOR GENERAL... VULCAN'S FORCES STILL OUTNUMBER US.

BUT I BELIEVE TAKING THIS TARGET WILL EVEN THOSE ODDS.

AND THEN WE BRING THE FIGHT TO CHANDILAR.


I AM CONFUSED, LORNA DANE. IF HAVOK IS FILLED WITH THIS "SELF-DOUBT" YOU SPEAK OF, WE SHOULD ALL START DOUBTING OURSELVES IMMEDIATELY.
WE WILL WIN THIS WAR MUCH QUICKER.
JUST WAIT FOR IT.


WHERE'S KORVUS? HE SEEMED CRANKY ON THE SUPPLY LINE MISSION. ARE YOU TWO STILL FIGHTING?
I BROKE IT OFF. WE'RE JUST TOO DIFFERENT, IT'S TOO WEIRD AND COMPLICATED. IF I CAN KEEP FROM MAKING OUT WITH HIM, I SHOULD BE OKAY.

VERY IMPRESSIVE, HAVOK. IN SUCH A SHORT TIME, YOU'VE BECOME AN EXPERT ON THE SHI'AR MILITARY LANDSCAPE.
YOUR STRATEGIES ARE EXCELLENT. I'M SURPRISED THAT EARTH CAN SPARE SUCH A NATURAL LEADER.

NO. I'M JUST HERE TO KILL VULCAN.
MY BROTHER CYCLOPS IS A GREAT LEADER, AND SO WAS MY FATHER. NOT ME.

AH. NEVER MIND.
TOLD YOU.

THE PLANET "STANDING STILL".

RESISTANCE HEADQUARTERS.

THE PEOPLE HERE ARE CALLING YOU "SAVIOR", ALEX.

YOU GIVE THEM HOPE.

THEY'RE MAKING A MISTAKE. I'M JUST A MAN. NOT MUCH OF ONE AT THAT.

LUCKILY, OUR ENEMY IS BUT A CHILD.

THE MOST POWERFUL CHILD IN THE GALAXY.

YOU AND RACHEL STILL FIGHTING?

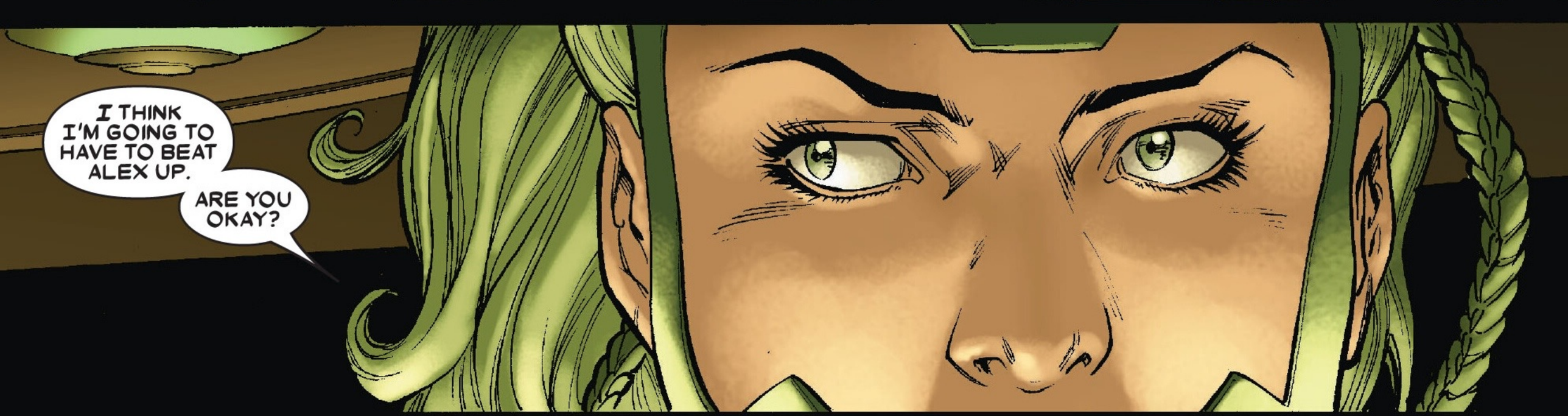
SHE VEXES ME. WAR SPREADS ACROSS THE GALAXY, AND I CANNOT STOP THINKING ABOUT HER.

YOU ARE HER UNCLE...I THINK. THE STORY IN HER MIND IS CONFUSING. DO YOU HAVE ANY WISDOM FOR ME?

SHE LIKES CHEESEBURGERS.

MAN, I COULD GO FOR A CHEESEBURGER.
AND SWEATPANTS. I MISS MY SWEATPANTS.

HOW LONG HAVE WE BEEN OUT HERE? FOREVER.
ALEX TOLD ME THAT HE CAN'T BEAT VULCAN. HE TRIED, AND FAILED. AND HIS FATHER DIED FOR IT.
THAT'S WHAT ALEX THINKS.


I THINK I'M GOING TO HAVE TO BEAT ALEX UP.
ARE YOU OKAY?

KORVUS DISTRACTED ME, CLOUDED EVERYTHING. BUT I FINALLY TALKED TO LILANDRA.
WHAT? ALONE? RAY, WE ASKED YOU NOT TO--
DID YOU KNOW THERE'S A SECRET ORDER WITHIN THE SHI'AR EMPIRE? WELL, THERE IS. THEY'RE THE ONES WHO ORDERED MY FAMILY KILLED.
OH, RACHEL...

SO WHEN WE TAKE DOWN VULCAN, I'M GOING TO FIND THE SECRET ORDER. AND I'M GOING TO MAKE THEM PAY.

CHANDILAR.
SHI'AR THRONEWORLD.

I HEARD HE WAS A SLAVE. THAT D'KEN TOOK HIM IN, AND WAS BETRAYED. MURDERED.

ANOTHER EARTHER MUTANT. LIKE LILANDRA'S SHAME...XAVIER. THE MUMMUDRAI DESTROYER.

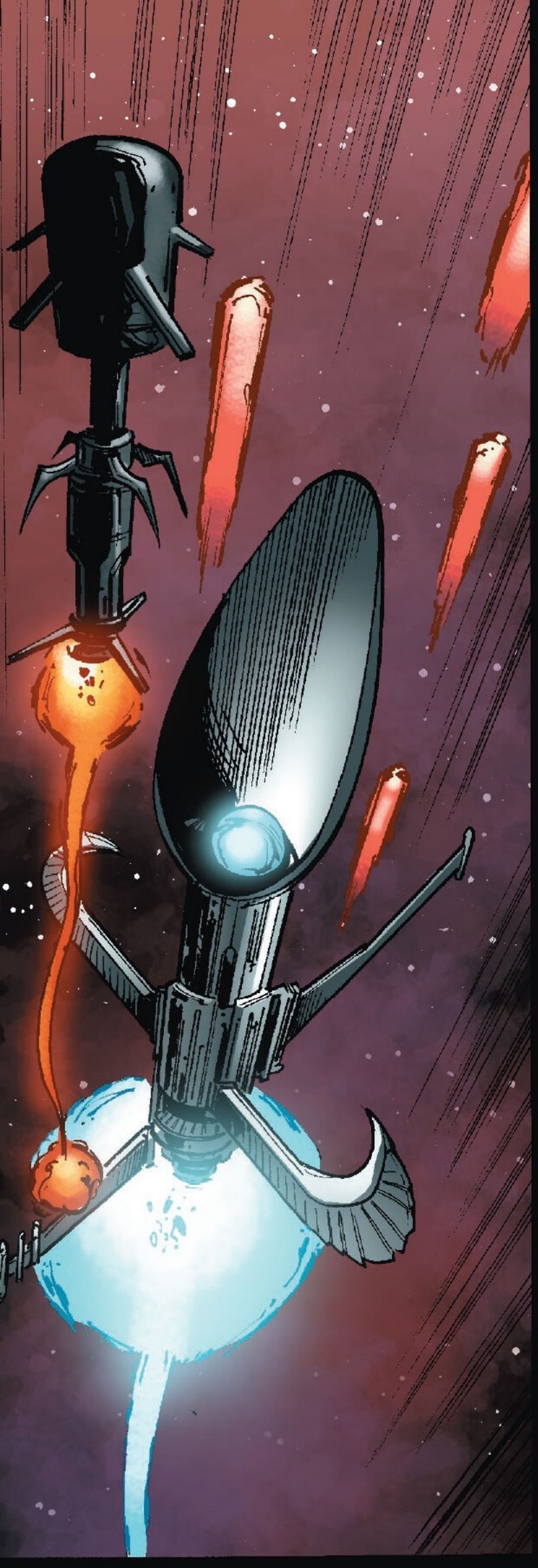
THEY SHOULD TAKE HIM OUT AND SHOOT HIM IN THE HEAD BEFORE HE DESTROYS THE EMPIRE.

THERE MUST BE A TRUE SHI'AR ON THE THRONE.

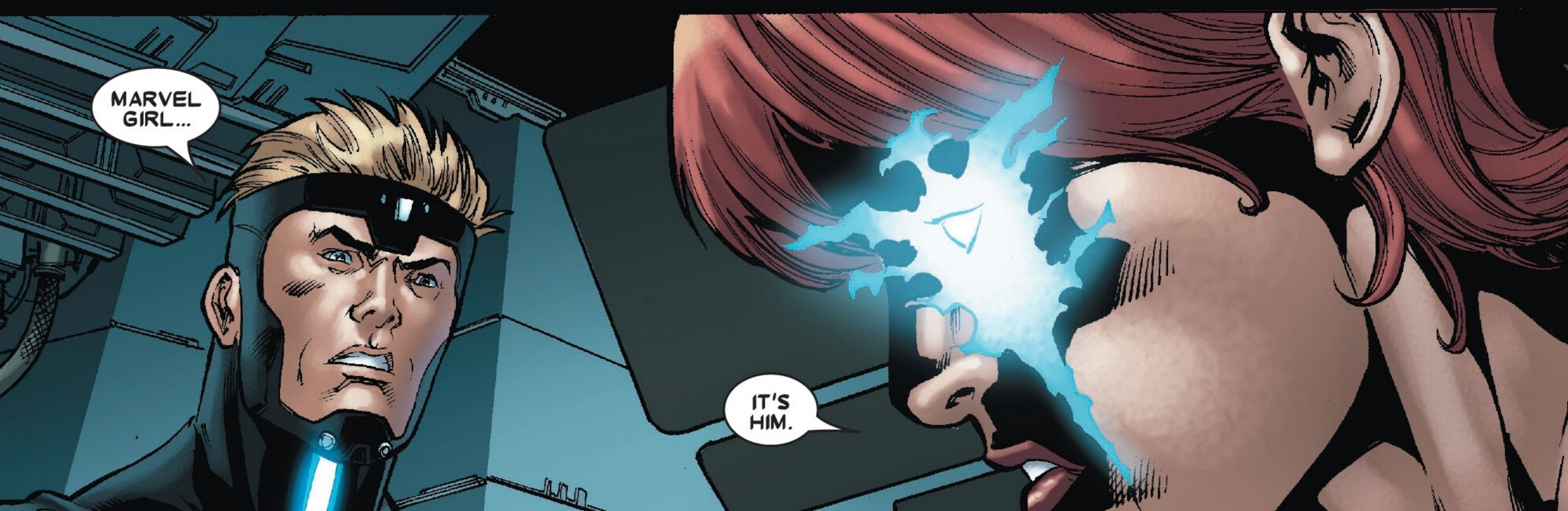
IT SAYS, "KILL THE FALSE EMPEROR."

CAL'SYEE!
THE EMPEROR SHOULD NOT TRAVEL WITHOUT AN IMPERIAL GUARD ESCORT.
THEY ARE JUST AS LIKELY TO TRY AND KILL ME AS ANYONE ELSE.
IT IS TRUE. THEY DO HATE YOU.
THANKS.
LET ME FINISH, HUSBAND. THEY HATE YOU, BECAUSE THEY DO NOT KNOW YOU. THEY DO NOT KNOW THAT YOU *ARE* SHI'AR.
WHAT?
YOU ARE. I CAN SEE IT INSIDE YOU, AND THE TIME WILL COME WHEN YOU WILL SHOW THE EMPIRE THAT YOU WERE BORN TO RULE THEM.
YOU WILL SHOW THEM GREATNESS THAT D'KEN NEVER POSSESSED, YOU WILL SHOW THEM STRENGTH THAT LILANDRA NEVER HAD. AND THEY WILL LOVE YOU FOR IT.
AS I DO.
NOW COME, MY EMPEROR... YOUR SPIES HAVE MUCH NEWS.
LET US PLAN THE DEATH OF THE RESISTANCE.

FEATHER'S EDGE.
"STILL NO SIGN THEY'VE DETECTED US.
"GOOD WORK, POLARIS."
JUST... HURRY... PLEASE.
CH'OD, ARE WE READY?
CORSAIR USED TO SING A SONG TO LEAD US INTO BATTLE.
SERIOUSLY?
NO.
LET'S DO THIS.



BREEE! BREEE! BREEEE!!
CH'OD!! REPORT!!
INCOMING, CAPTAIN. THE ENERGY SIGNATURE...
...THE SHI'AR ARE HERE. LOTS OF THEM.


MARVEL GIRL...
IT'S HIM.

"VULCAN IS HERE."

MY EMPIRE'S SPIES *ARE* GOOD.

KILL THE X-MEN. KILL KA'ARDUM AND LILANDRA. THE OTHERS WILL FALL IN LINE.

NOW.

THOOM!
THOOM!
KRA-KOOOM!
EVASIVE MANEUVERS!!
I ASSUMED.
YOUR BROTHER BROUGHT THE ENTIRE SHI'AR FLEET...HE KNEW WE WERE COMING.
THE WING OF K'YTHRI.
MAJOR GENERAL KA'ARDUM'S BATTLECRUISER.
THEY'RE CONCENTRATING FIRE ON THE STARJAMMER. THEY'LL BE KILLED!
CHAIN OF COMMAND...THIS SHIP WILL DOUBTLESSLY BE NEXT. VULCAN'S FORCES STILL OUTNUMBER US, EVEN IF BY A LITTLE.
AND HE STILL HAS THE IMPERIAL GUARD.
IF WE FIGHT NOW, WE WILL ALL BE KILLED.

OR SHOULD WE KILL THEM ALL? TELL ME, GLADIATOR.

YOU SAID BEFORE THAT THE SHI'AR WHO DEFECTED HAD NO HONOR. WOULD YOU KILL THEM ALL?

...I SERVE, EMPEROR. IT IS NOT MY PLACE TO DECIDE.

AND WHEN YOU TOOK MY EYE, WAS THAT SERVICE? OR WAS THAT YOUR DECISION?

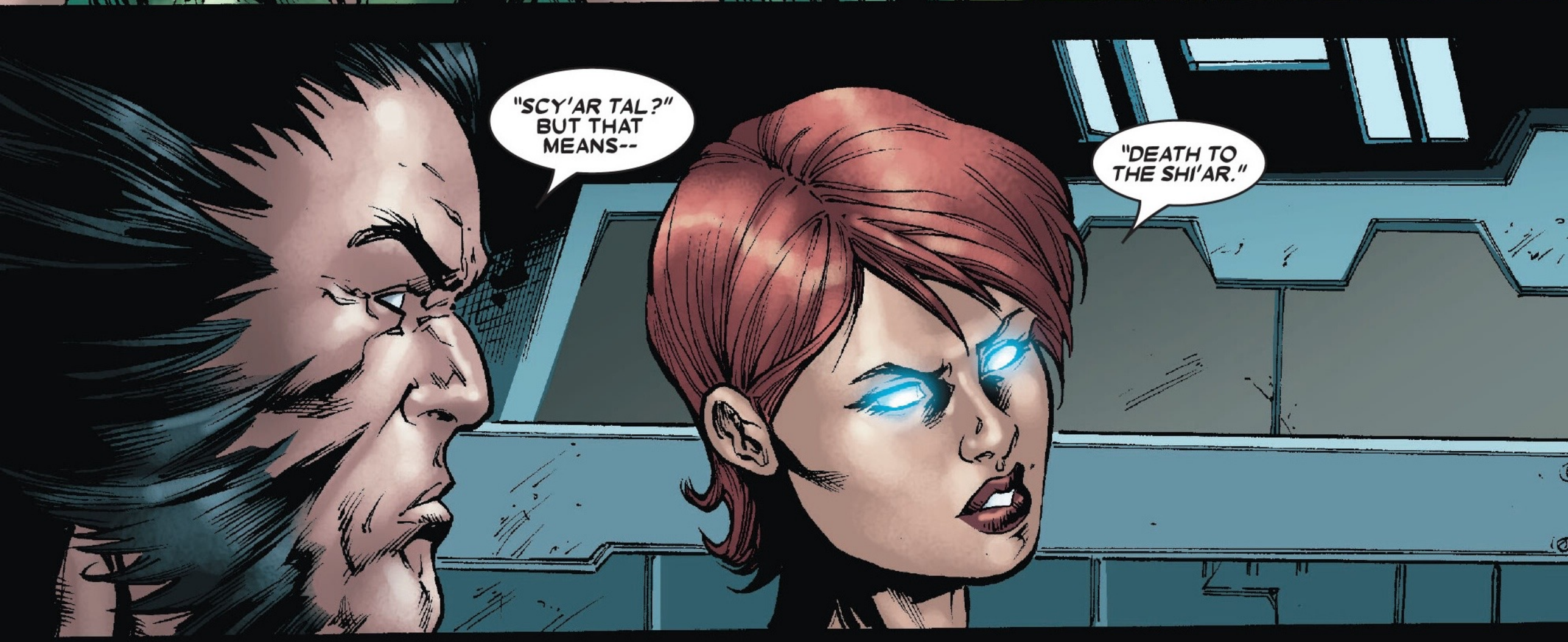
WHAT THE--?

KRRRRRRRRR

KA-BOOM

GODS HAVE MERCY. THE HAMMMER...THE HAMMER HAS BEEN DESTROYED.
UNCLE... WHAT IS HAPPENING? WHOSE SHIPS ARE THOSE?
MAJOR-GENERAL... THEY'RE BROADCASTING.

OH DEAR GOD... WHAT...WHAT HAPPENED? WAS THAT--?
INDEED, LASS. THE SHIP THEY JUST BLEW UP... THAT WAS THE EMPEROR'S.
HRM. THEY APPEAR TO BE CALLING THEMSELVES THE SCY'AR TAL. BOLD CHOICE.


"SCY'AR TAL?" BUT THAT MEANS--
"DEATH TO THE SHI'AR."

THE NAME OF THEIR RACE MEANS "DEATH TO THE SHI'AR."

X-MEN: EMPEROR VULCAN 2

1,000 YEARS AGO.

THE SHI'AR SCOUT SHIP "BLINDING VISION".

CAPTAIN? I THINK...I THINK WE'VE FOUND SOMETHING.

SENSORS ARE PICKING UP A MASSIVE ENERGY READING, BUT WE HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO MAKE VISUAL CONFIRMATION...

SIR... THERE ARE NO STARS.

"THE GODS IN MARRIAGE EXPELLED THEIR CHILDREN FROM THE AERIE, AND HID IT..."

SHARRA AND K'YTHRI BE PRAISED. REPORT BACK TO EMPEROR VYR'TAL...

...THE SHI'AR EMPIRE HAS RECLAIMED ITS BIRTHRIGHT.

SIR? WE'RE PICKING UP LIFE SIGNS IN ORBIT AROUND THE PLANET.

VREE! VREE! VREE!

THEY ARE IN SACRED SHI'AR SPACE, HELMSMAN. THEY WILL LEAVE...

...OR THEY WILL DIE.

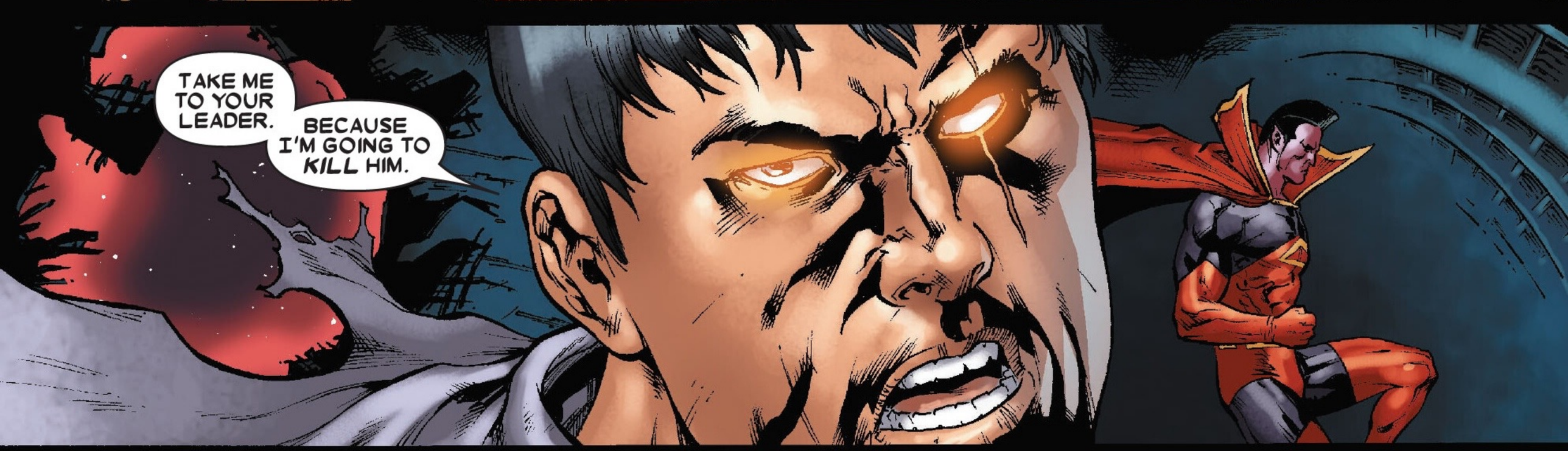
FEATHER'S EDGE.
NOW.

THE STARJAMMER.
WATCH YOUR SIDE!!
I THOUGHT I WOULD TRY EVASIVE MANEUVERS WITH MY EYES CLOSED THIS TIME. FOR VARIETY, *HRM?*
WE HAVE TO GET TO THAT COMMAND SHIP, THE ONE THAT FIRED ON VULCAN.
WE HAVE TO TRY AND COMMUNICATE WITH THEM!
AND OFFER THEM THANKS, eh, KORVUS?
WE SHALL SEE, LONGKNIFE.
KORVUS, CONTACT KA'ARDUM AND LILANDRA, TELL THEM TO WITHDRAW THE RESISTANCE FLEET NOW.
RACHEL, TRY TO REACH THE *SCY'AR TAL* TELEPATHICALLY. SEE IF YOU CAN FIGURE OUT WHAT THEY ACTUALLY WANT.
WELL, ACCORDING TO THEIR NAME...
JUST DRIVE, CH'OD!
Oh, DAMMIT. ALEX...I CAN FEEL HIM, HIS ENERGY. HE'S STILL ALIVE.
WHO?

GABRIEL SUMMERS, ALSO KNOWN AS...

EMPEROR VULCAN

CHOOOM!
AI'LEEE!


TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER.
BECAUSE I'M GOING TO KILL HIM.

YOU ARE THE SHI'AR PRETENDER. BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT SHI'AR, I WILL GIVE YOU THIS GIFT...
RUN AWAY, PRETENDER, AND LIVE.

YOU DESTROY MY COMMAND SHIP, YOU KILL MY MEN, AND YOU EXPECT ME TO WALK AWAY? I AM NO PRETENDER, ALIEN. MY NAME IS *VULCAN*, AND I AM *EMPEROR* OF THE SHI'AR.

YOU STAND WITH THE SHI'AR, THEN?

HERE'S MY ANSWER.

NO... THAT'S NOT POSSIBLE...
THAT'S NOT POSS--
HNNN!!!
GLADIATOR! WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? KILL HIM ALREADY!!
AS YOU COMMAND, EMPEROR.

THOK!!
AAARGHH!!!
SNAP!
YOU ARE ALSO NOT SHI'AR.
WHAT A WASTE.

YOU WILL DIE NOW, PRETENDER, FOR NOTHING. YOUR ALLEGIANCE TO THE SHI'AR SEALS YOUR FATE.
THE SCY'AR TAL WILL TAKE BACK WHAT IS OURS.
AND WE WILL HAVE VENGEANCE.
YOU...WILL... DIE!!

WHERE IS HE?

HE RAN, ELDEST. THE COWARD RAN.

NO, BROTHER. THIS ONE IS NO COWARD, AND HE IS NOT WEAK.

THIS ONE IS DANGEROUS.

BUT IT MATTERS NOT. ALL THAT MATTERS IS THE END OF THE SHI'AR. THE END OF ALL THINGS.

LET'S HOPE IT DOESN'T COME TO THAT.

WHO SPEAKS?

ELDEST? I SAID NOTHING.

I SEE YOU IN MY MIND?

ASTRAL PROJECTION. SORRY FOR THE INTRUSION.

MY NAME IS HAVOK, AND THIS IS MARVEL GIRL. WE'RE THE STARJAMMERS, AND WE WOULD ASK THAT YOU PAUSE AND SPEAK WITH US.

WE REPRESENT THE RESISTANCE TO THE SHI'AR EMPIRE.

MORE NOT-SHI'AR. YOU ARE LIKE HIM... THE PRETEND EMPEROR.

WILL YOU CHOOSE DEATH AS WELL? WILL FINALITY TAKE YOU, TOO?

WHATEVER PROBLEM YOU HAVE WITH THE SHI'AR, WE CAN COME TO A PEACEFUL RESOLUTION. THERE'S NO NEED FOR THIS... THE SHI'AR'S TRUE LEADER IS LILANDRA NERAMANI.

SHE'S READY TO TAKE BACK CONTROL OF THE EMPIRE FROM THE MAN YOU FACED, VULCAN...

...MY BROTHER.

WHAT? YOUR *BROTHER?*

YOU *LIE!* THIS...THIS MAKES NO SENSE. YOU WOULD SEE YOUR BROTHER FAIL? YOU WOULD FIGHT *AGAINST* YOUR OWN BLOOD?

MY BROTHER IS...THE SITUATION, IT'S COMPLICATED.

NOTHING IS LESS COMPLICATED THAN BROTHERHOOD.

FOR IF YOU CANNOT STAND WITH YOUR BROTHERS, THEN YOU WILL DIE ALONE.

YOU ARE WITHIN MY MIND. YOUR POWER, WE KNOW IT.

SEE TRUTH, PHOENIX.

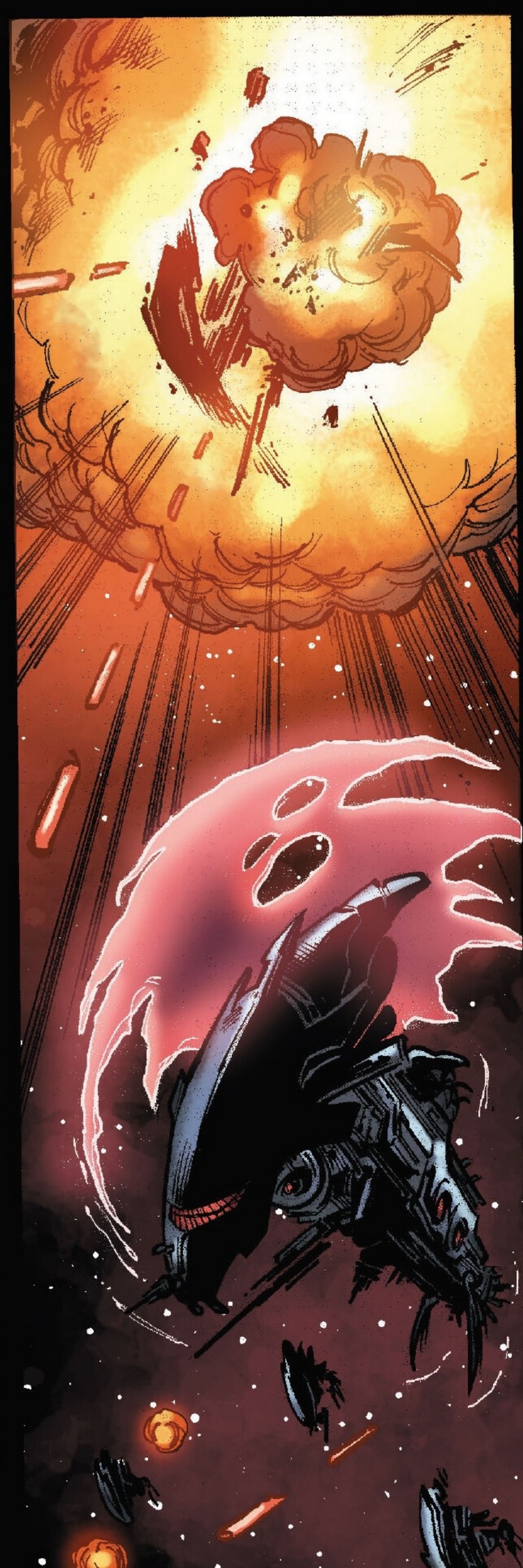
AAAH!!

AAAHHH!

HNN!!

ALEX! RACHEL!

GOOD, YOU ARE AWAKE. VULCAN IS COUNTERATTACKING, AND WE ARE MOST LIKELY GOING TO DIE NOW.



RACHEL, PLEASE... REST.
I SAW IT IN HIS MIND...THEY DON'T HAVE NAMES, THEY CALL HIM THE ELDEST. THE SHI'AR NEARLY WIPED OUT THEIR ENTIRE CIVILIZATION, DROVE THEM FROM THEIR HOME.
THEY'RE COMING TO TAKE IT BACK.
THIS BE NOT NEW...THIS IS WHAT THE SHI'AR DO.
WELL, MAYBE WE CAN HELP. WE CAN TALK TO LILANDRA...
LORNA'S RIGHT, THIS IS NO PROBLEM.
THE SCY'AR TAL HELP US KILL VULCAN, LILANDRA GIVES THEM THEIR LANDS BACK. WIN-WIN.
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND...
SCY'AR TAL ISN'T THEIR ORIGINAL NAME. THEY'VE SPENT THE LAST THOUSAND YEARS CHANGING THEIR CULTURE, CHANGING THEMSELVES TO FIGHT THE SHI'AR.
THEIR RACE'S REAL NAME IS *M'KRAAN.*
THE PLANET THEY WANT, THE THING THEY WORSHIPPED...
THEY'VE COME TO TAKE BACK THE M'KRAAN CRYSTAL.

THE SCY'AR TAL COMMANDSHIP HAS FIRED A...

STRANGE. IT HAS THE LOOK OF A MISSILE, BUT ISN'T REGISTERING AS A WEAPON.

VREE! VREE! VREE!

"IT'S HEADING TO THE PLANET BELOW.

"IT'S TRANSMITTING A SIGNAL...THEY'VE FIRED A HOMING BEACON."

"WILL FINALITY TAKE YOU TOO?"

OH, GOD.

SHOOT IT!! SHOOT IT DOWN!!

IT'S A HOMING BEACON.
SO? I WANT THESE ALIENS *DEAD.* I WANT THE RESISTANCE *DESTROYED.*
EMPEROR... THE SCY'AR TAL FLEET...
"THEY'RE WARPING AWAY. THEY'RE RUNNING."
THEY'RE... WHY WOULD THEY FIRE A HOMING BEACON DOWN TO THE PLANET? IT DOESN'T MAKE...
...GET US OUT.
GET US OUT OF HERE! NOW!!

LORNA, STOP IT!!
I...I CAN'T GET A HOLD ON IT, IT MUST NOT BE METAL! RACHEL, WHAT IS GOING ON?!
I CAN CATCH IT, I CAN STOP THIS...
HAVE YOU GONE MAD, RACHEL?
KORVUS, LET ME GO!! I CAN FEEL THE PEOPLE ON THE PLANET DOWN THERE, THEY'RE GOING TO DIE!
THOSE "BAD FEELINGS" ABOUT THINGS YOU HUMANS GET...I AM HAVING THAT NOW.
CH'OD!! WARP JUMP, NOW!!!

"WHAT HAPPENED?"

SHARRA AND K'YTHRI PRESERVE US...

WHAT... HAPPENED?

IT WAS SHI'AR STARGATE TECHNOLOGY...BUT ON A LEVEL THAT SIMPLY ISN'T POSSIBLE.

A STAR EMERGED FROM THE GATE, SIR...THEY DROPPED A STAR ON FEATHER'S EDGE.

GODS...SUCH A WEAPON... WHO COULD CONCEIVE OF SUCH A THING?

BEFORE THEY LEFT...WHAT WAS THE TRAJECTORY OF THE SCY'AR TAL SHIPS? WHERE WERE THEY GOING?

THE WORLD, SIR.

THE SCY'AR TAL ARE HEADING TO THE M'KRAAN CRYSTAL.

FEATHER'S EDGE HAD A CIVILIAN POPULATION OF 2.4 BILLION.
ALL DEAD.
IS IT TRUE, LILANDRA? DID THE SHI'AR DO WHAT THE ELDER SAID?
IS THE M'KRAAN CRYSTAL PLANET THEIR HOME?
NO! THAT PLANET, IT IS THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE SHI'AR! SHARRA AND K'YTHRI RELEASED US INTO THE UNIVERSE, THEN HID THE AERIE IN DARKNESS.
D'KEN FOUND IT, USING THE SCRIPTURES AND THE RUMORS OF A LOST SHI'AR SCOUTING EXPEDITION...
THE PLANET IS OUR RIGHTFUL HOME, AND THE CRYSTAL IS A RESPONSIBILITY GIVEN TO US BY THE GODS!
THEN WHY DO YOU FEAR IT? WHY DO YOU CALL IT THE M'KRAAN CRYSTAL?
YOU TOOK IT FROM THEM, LILANDRA.
THAT IS A LIE!
THE CRYSTAL IS THE END OF ALL THAT IS. IT IS A NEXUS OF ALL REALITIES, BUT CAN DESTROY OURS IN A BLINK OF AN EYE.
EVEN AFTER WHAT WE JUST WITNESSED...PERHAPS THE SCY'AR TAL ARE THE LESSER OF TWO EVILS. COULD IT BE ANY WORSE THAN THE CRYSTAL BEING IN VULCAN'S HANDS?
WHAT THE--?!

HELLO, ALEX.
TIME OUT.

X-MEN: EMPEROR VULCAN 3

1,000 YEARS AGO.
THE M'KRAAN EXODUS.

THE SHI'AR MASSACRED MY PEOPLE, IN FRONT OF MY EYES.

WE WERE A PEACEFUL RACE, AND NOT PREPARED FOR THE AVIANS' SAVAGERY. THOSE OF US WHO SURVIVED TRAVELED THE SPACEWAYS, LOOKING FOR REFUGE.

...MUST RECLAIM... THE GOD IN CRYSTAL...

THEY DESTROYED OUR HOMELAND, OUR WAY OF LIFE, AND MADE CLAIM TO THE GODSTONE.

AND THEY KILLED MY ELDEST.

...TAKE OUR PEOPLE'S STRENGTH...YOU ARE THE NEXT ELDEST.

BUT THE SHI'AR DID NOT KNOW THE NATURE OF MY BROTHERS. THE STRENGTH WE HAVE TOGETHER.

RISE, BROTHERS.

ELDEST.

ELDEST.

ELDEST.

WE HAVE MUCH TO DO.

HAD THEY KNOWN OUR RESOLVE, THEY WOULD HAVE KILLED US ALL.

NOW.
THE STARJAMMER.
VULCAANN!!
EMPEROR VULCAN

HNNN!
GOOD EFFORT, BIG BROTHER. SAME RESULT.

YOU'RE DEAD, GABRIEL... DO YOU HEAR ME?!
ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DO THIS RIGHT HERE AND NOW?
THINK CAREFULLY, ALEX.

DO YOU REALLY WANT TO RIP APART YOUR OWN SHIP IN A FIGHT YOU CAN'T WIN?
OR DOES XAVIER LET ANY MORON LEAD AN X-MEN TEAM?

ALEX... VULCAN HASN'T ATTACKED. THE IMPERIAL GUARD HASN'T MOVED A MUSCLE.

YOU SHOULD LISTEN TO LORNA, ALEX. I'M JUST HERE TO TALK.

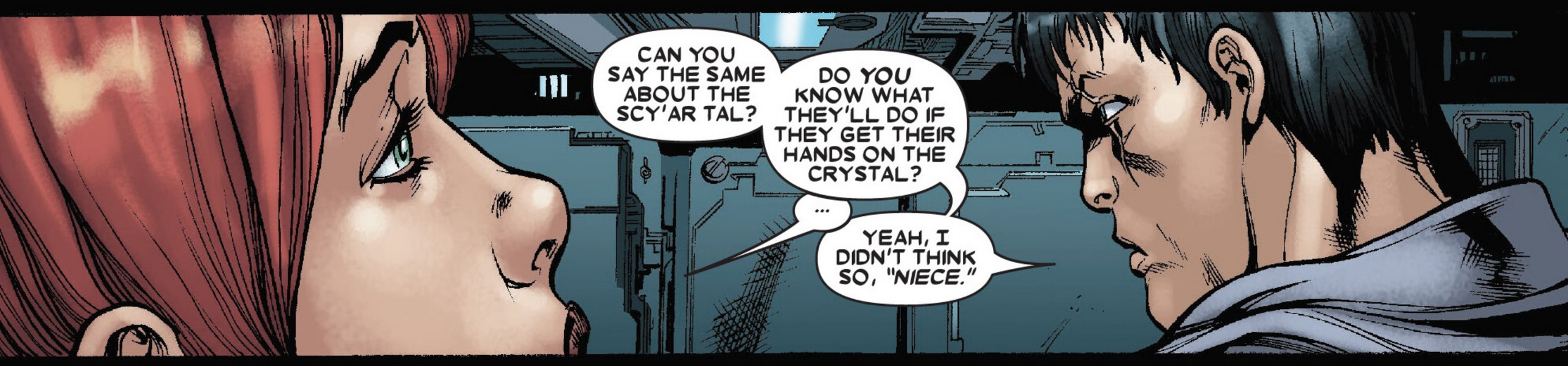
RACHEL, WHAT ARE YOU GETTING?
INTERFERENCE, IN VULCAN'S MIND AND ALL OF THE GUARD. I CAN GET YOU AN ANSWER...
...BUT I'D HAVE TO KILL THE TELEPATH FIRST.

TSK. TSK. TSK.
SO WILLING TO KILL. CYCLOPS WOULD BE PROUD OF YOU TWO.
BUT IF YOU'RE ALL DONE FOOLING YOURSELVES IT SEEMS WE HAVE A COMMON ENEMY...THE SCY'AR TAL.

THESE CREATURES ARE AFTER THE M'KRAAN CRYSTAL, WHICH NOW BELONGS TO *ME*.
YOU WANT US TO HELP *YOU*?! WE'D BE BETTER OFF HELPING THE SCY'AR TAL! YOU'RE INSANE! YOU KILLED BANSHEE...YOU TRIED TO KILL THE PROFESSOR! YOU KILLED CORSAIR, MY GRANDFATHER!

AND THE SCY'AR TAL JUST KILLED SEVERAL BILLION PEOPLE.
MY PEOPLE.

THERE ARE A LOT OF THINGS I WANT TO DO RIGHT NOW. KILL YOU...FIND XAVIER AND KILL HIM...
BUT DESTROYING THE *UNIVERSE* IS NOT ON MY LIST.


CAN YOU SAY THE SAME ABOUT THE SCY'AR TAL?
DO *YOU* KNOW WHAT THEY'LL DO IF THEY GET THEIR HANDS ON THE CRYSTAL?
...
YEAH, I DIDN'T THINK SO, "*NIECE*."

THESE "*SCY'AR*" ARE THREATENING MY PEOPLE...THEY'RE THREATENING ALL OF REALITY.
AND YOU X-MEN...WELL, YOU'RE THE IDIOTS THAT FIGHT PEOPLE LIKE THEM. AND YOU'VE DEALT WITH THE CRYSTAL BEFORE.
SO WE WORK TOGETHER TO DEAL WITH THIS.

YOU HAVE 24 HOURS TO DECIDE.

I ASSUME YOU'RE LULLING HIM INTO A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY, YES?
SHUT UP.

THE CLENCH WORLDS.

"HE'S DESPERATE. BOTTOM LINE..."

...VULCAN MUST HAVE GOTTEN *TRASHED* BY THE SCY'AR TAL ELDEST. HE WAS *HURT*.

AND ANYONE NOTICE GLADIATOR? HE HAD A BROKEN ARM. ALL OF THE X-MEN COMBINED COULDN'T PUT A SCRATCH ON GLADIATOR.

APPEALING TO YOUR ENEMIES FOR AID, THIS IS WEAKNESS IN *ANY* CULTURE.

THE SHI'AR PEOPLE ARE ILL AT EASE WITH VULCAN'S RULE...IF THEY WERE TO LEARN OF THIS, THEIR LOYALTY WOULD FURTHER DETERIORATE.

INDEED. THE IMPERIAL GUARD LOOKED UPON VULCAN WITH MURDER IN THEIR HEARTS.

RUMOR HAS IT, HE KILLED SEVERAL OF THEM WHEN FIRST THEY MET.

VULCAN WANTS TO USE THE STARJAMMER AS A WEAPON AGAINST THE SCY'AR TAL. AND ONCE THEY'RE DEALT WITH, HE'LL BETRAY US.

IT'S NOT *IF*. IT'S *WHEN*.

BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW? YOU KNOW I SUPPORT YOU, ALEX... THIS IS YOUR BROTHER, AND HE TOOK YOUR FATHER...BUT IS THAT IT?
OUR OPTIONS ARE HELP A MURDERER, SOMEONE WHO'S KILLED OUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY...
...OR ALLOW AN UNKNOWN RACE THAT COULD VERY WELL BE INTENDING GENOCIDE TO TAKE POSSESSION OF THE M'KRAAN CRYSTAL.
IF WE CONSIDERED NEGOTIATING, ASSUMING THEY HAVE A LEGITIMATE CLAIM--
THEY DO NOT! YOU CANNOT NEGOTIATE WITH THESE BLASPHEMERS, X-MAN.
THE CRYSTAL MUST REMAIN IN SHI'AR HANDS. IT IS OUR SACRED RIGHT!
YOUR SACRED RIGHT? THE SHI'AR ARE CONQUERORS. HOW MANY OTHER CULTURES' HOLY LANDS DO THE SHI'AR OCCUPY? HOW MANY RELIGIONS HAVE YOU CRUSHED, LILANDRA?
WHAT IF THE SCY'AR TAL'S GODS TOLD THEM IT WAS THEIR SACRED RIGHT?
YOU SAW WHAT THEY DID!! HOW CAN YOU BE CONSIDERING THIS?!
ALEX... LORNA...
NIECE... PLEASE. CALM YOURSELF. HAVOK WAS JUST MAKING A POINT.

THE POINT IS, THE SCY'AR TAL TOOK THE OPTION OFF THE TABLE WHEN THEY DESTROYED FEATHER'S EDGE.
WE HAVE NO REASON TO BELIEVE THEY'RE GOING TO STOP. BUT WE CAN'T FIGHT THEM ALONE.
SO WE TAKE THE DEAL. WE HELP VULCAN STOP THE SCY'AR TAL. AND THEN...
...THEN IT'S JUST A MATTER OF WHICH SIDE CAN KILL THE OTHER FIRST.
AND I'LL TAKE THOSE ODDS.

THE PLANET "STANDING STILL".

ALEX?

CAN'T SLEEP? WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?

THE USUAL. DOUBTING MYSELF, WONDERING WHAT SCOTT WOULD DO, WONDERING IF MY DAD IS PROUD OF ME.

...WOW. THAT'S QUITE A BIT OF SELF-AWARENESS YOU'VE GOT THERE.

YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO SEES A THERAPIST, YOU KNOW.

WHAT IS IT WITH US, LORNA? IT SEEMS LIKE NO MATTER WHERE WE GO OR WHAT WE DO, THE TWO OF US ALWAYS END UP IN IMPOSSIBLE SITUATIONS.

I'M A SIMPLE GUY. AND YET, HERE I AM, FORCED TO HELP THE MAN WHO KILLED MY FATHER.

REMEMBER WHEN WE JUST FOUGHT SENTINELS?

SO WHAT *WOULD* SCOTT DO?

DOESN'T MATTER WHAT SCOTT WOULD DO, WHAT MY FATHER WOULD DO, WHAT THE PROFESSOR WOULD DO...I CAN'T THINK LIKE THAT ANYMORE. I WON'T.

I KNOW WHAT I HAVE TO DO.

NO MATTER HOW COMPLICATED THINGS GET, THIS CAN ONLY END ONE WAY.

GABRIEL IS TOO FAR GONE. THE X-MEN BELIEVE IN REDEMPTION, BUT IT'S TOO LATE FOR HIM. WE WOULD HAVE GIVEN HIM EVERY CHANCE WE COULD, BUT NOT AFTER WHAT HE'S DONE.

VULCAN... MY BROTHER... HAS TO DIE.

AND I'M PRETTY SURE THAT'S SOMETHING SCOTT *COULDN'T* DO.

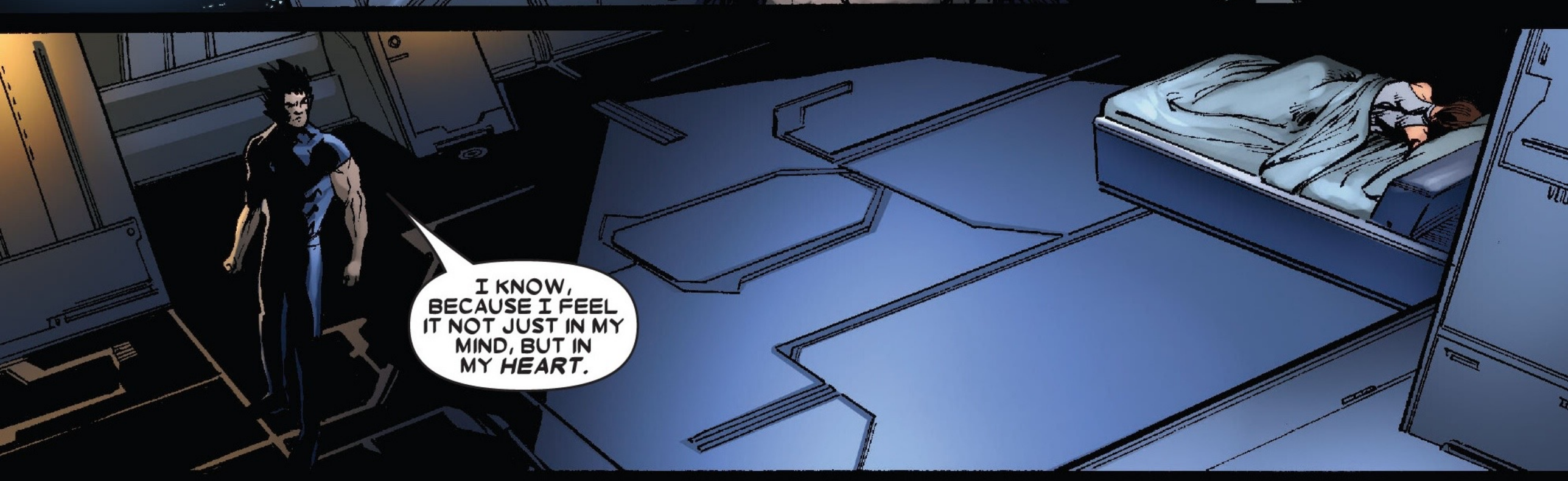
THEN IT WOULD BE MY GREAT PLEASURE TO TEACH YOU.
GRANDPA!
NO...NO, PLEASE...
AIEEE!!
AARGH!
...PLEASE... I'M SORRY... I DIDN'T MEAN FOR IT TO HAPPEN...
THEY BEAR YOUR GENOME.

RACHEL!
NOOOO!!!

YOU'RE HAVING THE DREAM AGAIN.
STAY OUT OF MY THOUGHTS. JUST STAY AWAY, KORVUS.
PLEASE.

YOU GAVE ME YOUR DREAM, RACHEL.
WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?
I CAN'T DO THIS, NOT NOW. WHAT WE HAVE, IT'S NOT *REAL*.

THAT IS NOT WHAT I MEANT. YOU ARE BECOMING CONSUMED WITH THOUGHTS OF REVENGE.
YOUR NAME MAY AS WELL BE SCY'AR TAL. BUT TELL ME...IF EVERY SHI'AR DIED TODAY, WOULD IT BRING YOUR FAMILY BACK?
THE CONNECTION WE SHARE IS REAL, RACHEL.


I KNOW, BECAUSE I FEEL IT NOT JUST IN MY MIND, BUT IN MY *HEART*.

AND I WILL UNTIL THE DAY MY HEART STOPS BEATING.

WELL, WELL, WELL.
LOOK WHAT THE CAT DRAGGED IN.
WELCOME TO MY EMPIRE.
WE'RE STILL ALIVE.
AYE.
DOUBLE OR NOTHING?

THIS IS A MISTAKE, HUSBAND.
THEY ARE TOO DANGEROUS. KILL THEM NOW.
THEY'LL KEEP THEIR WORD. THAT'S ALL THEY KNOW HOW TO DO. BESIDES...
...THE CHANCELLOR'S GUARD IS JOINING US, JUST IN CASE.
THE CHANCELLOR'S GUARD? WHO IS--
I AM HERE, EMPEROR, AS COMMANDED.
WHAT ARE YOUR--K'YTHRI PRESERVE US--THE STARCHILDE!
YOU.

MURDERERS!

NO!!
COMMANDOS! PROTECT THE CHANCELLOR!
YOU KILLED MY COUSINS! MY AUNTS AND UNCLES!
YOU KILLED MY GRANDPARENTS!
I CAN SEE THE GUILT IN YOUR THOUGHTS. YOU RUN THE SECRET ORDER. YOU SIGNED MY FAMILY'S DEATH WARRANT. I WANT TO HEAR YOU SAY IT.
SAY IT!

RACHEL, STOP!!

LET GO OF ME, LORNA!

YOU HAVE TO STOP, RAY.
THEY KILLED THEM, LORNA...YOU WEREN'T THERE, YOU DON'T KNOW...
THEY HAVE TO PAY.

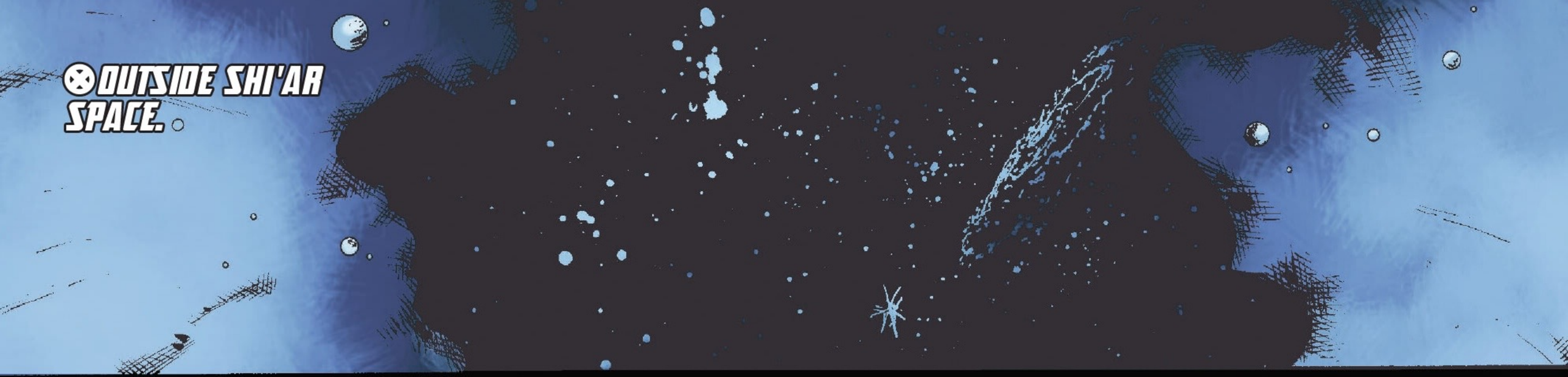
EMPEROR, PLEASE...
SORRY, CHANCELLOR... DIDN'T SEE THAT ONE COMING.
BUT FRANKLY... I'M ENJOYING THE SHOW.

IT HAS TO WAIT, RACHEL.
ALEX, NO.
WE HAVE TO DEAL WITH THE M'KRAAN CRYSTAL FIRST, WE JUST *HAVE* TO. I KNOW. I KNOW HOW HARD IT IS. BUT THIS IS BIGGER THAN ALL OF US.
YOU'RE MY FAMILY NOW. AND I SWEAR TO YOU, ONCE WE'RE DONE HERE, I WILL HELP YOU DO THIS. WE'LL MAKE THEM *ALL* PAY. TOGETHER.

SOON?
SOON.

LATER.
"LOOK AT DEATHBIRD. SHE ALMOST DISEMBOWELED ME, NOW SHE'S GLARING AT ME?"
HRM, PERHAPS SHE ENVIES YOUR HAIR.
OR SHE'S THINKING OF WAYS TO KILL ME.
OR THAT.
HOW COZY, MY WHOLE ARMADA TOGETHER AGAIN.
WELCOME, MAJOR-GENERAL. SHALL WE GO KILL SOME SCY'AR?
NO. THAT'S THE WRONG PLAY.
WE TAKE OUT THE WEAPON FIRST. WE TAKE OUT FINALITY.

CH'OD WAS ABLE TO TRACK THE ENERGY READINGS FROM THE FIRST ATTACK, AND FOUND THE SOURCE LOCATION OF THE STAR.
IF YOU WANT TO STOP THESE PEOPLE, *THIS* IS HOW YOU DO IT. SEND THE ARMADA TO DEFEND THE CRYSTAL, AND SEND IN A STRIKE TEAM TO TAKE OUT FINALITY.
...
OKAY. IT'S YOUR CALL.
THE STARJAMMERS AND IMPERIAL GUARD WILL GO AFTER THE WEAPON.
KA'ARDUM WILL LEAD THE FLEET TO THE CRYSTAL.
ALL RIGHT. WE LAUNCH WITHIN THE HOUR.


OUTSIDE SHI'AR SPACE.

THE IMPERIAL GUARD SHIP "PRAETORIUM" AND THE STARJAMMER.
"CH'OD, RAZA... REPORT!"

THE PRAETORIUM MADE THE JUMP WITH US.
MULTIPLE CONTACTS... SCY'AR TAL.
PROXIMITY TO THE GRAVITY FIELD IS PLAYING HAVOC WITH THE SENSORS. *HRM*, POOR WORD CHOICE.

CLEVER ALIENS.

DEAR LORD... I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE JUST ONE...
CREDIT TO THE SCY'AR, YES?

THEY ARE NOT DOING THIS HALFWAY.

"IT'S A SOLAR NURSERY. THERE MUST BE DOZENS OF STARS HERE, ALL IN ONE PLACE.

"THEY'RE USING IT AS AN AMMO DEPOT."

EEK.

THEY HAVE THE MEANS TO DESTROY EVERY PLANET IN THE CORE SYSTEMS.

THEY COULD DESTROY ALL OF--

--THE SHI'AR EMPIRE.

MY EMPIRE.

PREPARE THE GUARD. EVERY SCY'AR HERE *DIES*.

AND THAT'S JUST FOR STARTERS.

X-MEN: EMPEROR VULCAN 4

"THE WORLD," HOME OF THE M'KRAAN CRYSTAL.

NOW.

HOW I LONGED FOR THE DARKNESS, ALL THESE CENTURIES. TO GAZE UPON THE GODSTONE.

NOW, FINALLY, TO RETURN...IT IS RIGHTEOUS.

MY BROTHERS... WE ARE HOME.

ELDEST... THEY ARE COMING.

THE SHI'AR INTEND TO FIGHT.

GOOD.

THE WING OF K'YTHRI.

MAJOR GENERAL KA'ARDUM'S BATTLECRUISER.

"THEY HAVE TO DIE."

SILENCE, BETRAYER! FOUL ENOUGH THAT YOUR PRESENCE HERE IS A CONCESSION TO A MADMAN...

IF YOU HAD ANY HONOR, YOU WOULD END YOUR OWN LIFE FOR ACTING AGAINST YOUR EMPRESS.

YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND, DO YOU?

THESE HERETICS, THE SCY'AR TAL...THEY THREATEN THE VERY FABRIC OF OUR CIVILIZATION.

NO ONE HATES THESE CREATURES MORE THAN ME, ARAKI...BUT WE ARE HERE TO PREVENT THEM FROM TAKING THE CRYSTAL WHILE THE STARJAMMERS DESTROY THEIR STAR WEAPON.

I WILL SHOW THEM THE ERROR OF THEIR WAYS AND MAKE THEM ADMIT THE TRUTH... BUT I WILL NOT EXTERMINATE A SPECIES.

AND *THIS* IS WHY YOU WERE A WEAK RULER. YOU ARE NOT WILLING TO DO WHAT MUST BE DONE, EVEN WHEN YOU KNOW IT TO BE RIGHT.

THE SCY'AR TAL MUST DIE. *THAT* IS WHAT THE SHI'AR PEOPLE *WANT*.

BUT YOU ARE SO FAR REMOVED FROM YOUR OWN PEOPLE, YOU DO NOT SEE IT.

ENOUGH. THE END IS BEGINNING. LET US PRAY THAT HAVOK MAKES SURE IT IS NOT *OUR* END.

KA'ARDUM TO ALL SHIPS...

FIRE.

ELDEST...
SILENCE. YOUR BROTHERS DIE TO MAKE THE SHI'AR FINALLY PAY. WE MUST HONOR--
ELDEST... IT IS FINALITY. A DISTRESS CALL.
WHAT? SHOW ME.
ELDEST! WE ARE UNDER ATTACK!
FINALITY HAS BEEN DISCOVERED.
BY WHO? THE SHI'AR?
NO...

"...THE STARJAMMERS!"
THE KA'LEB MOLECULAR CLOUD.
OUTSIDE SHI'AR SPACE.
HRM. PERHAPS NOT THE MOST SUBTLE STRATEGY.

"LUCKILY WE'RE INCREDIBLY OUTNUMBERED, YES?"

"YE ARE GOING SOFT, CH'OD!"

HEPZIBAH IS SORRY SHE'S MISSING THIS, WHEREVER SHE IS. NOW, IF ONLY WE WERE KILLING SHI'AR.

PRESENT COMPANY EXCLUDED, EH, KORVUS?

YOU'RE TOO KIND, RAZA.

TWO SHIPS APPROACHING FROM STARBOARD...ONE MORE UNDER US...THE M'KRAAN HAVE BEEN GUARDING THIS STATION FOR OVER A HUNDRED YEARS...

LORNA, BEHIND US, THREE MORE SHIPS COMING IN. THE IMPERIAL GUARD ARE ENGAGING... WE CAN'T DO THIS FOR LONG.

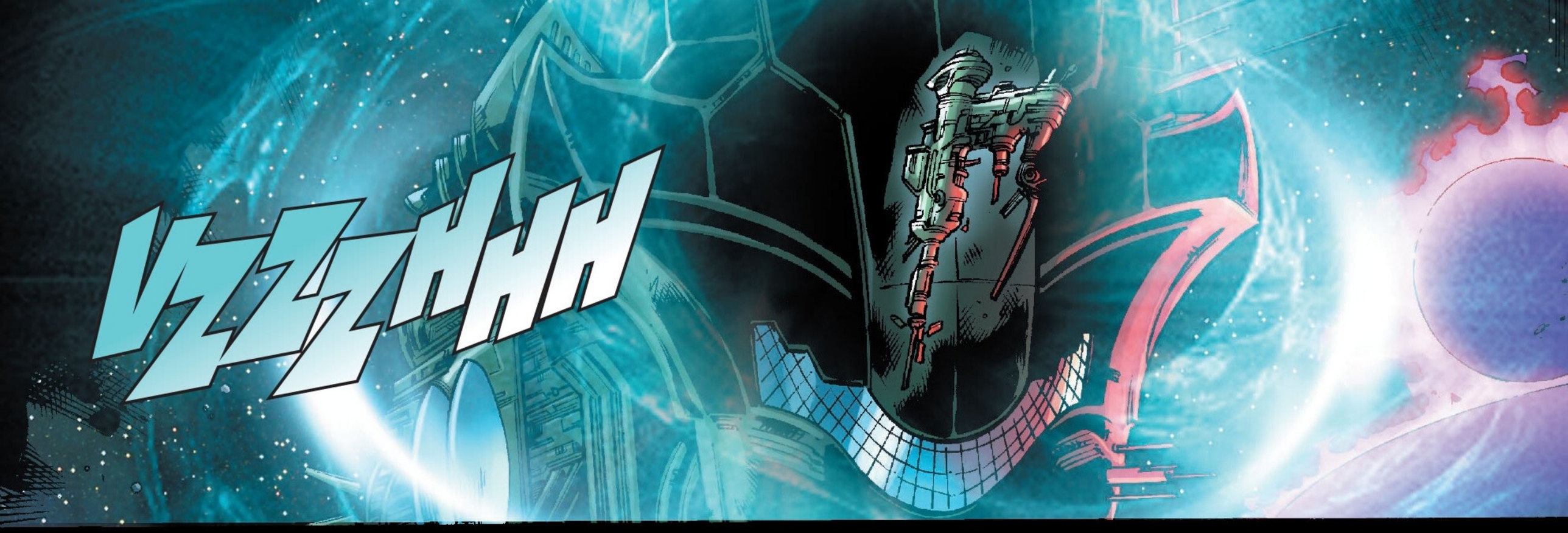
WE'LL HOLD OUT AS LONG AS IT TAKES, WE HAVE TO. THEY'RE DEPENDING ON US.

ALEX AND...

EMPEROR VULCAN
FINALITY STATION.

BOOOM!
HULL BREACH IN PROGRESS! RAISING EMERGENCY FORCE FIELDS...RESTORING ATMOSPHERE.
REMEMBER, WE DISABLE THE WEAPON AND GET BACK TO THE FLEET. THEY CAN'T HOLD OUT FOR LONG.
AAIIEEE!!
GOD, YOU'RE BORING, ALEX. IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO DESTROY THE WEAPON... THE SCY'AR HAVE TO KNOW.
THEY HAVE TO SEE THE BODIES. THEY HAVE TO BE AFRAID.
WE'RE HERE TO SAVE LIVES, GABRIEL-- NOT PLAY GAMES.
LOOK AT US, ALEX...WORKING TOGETHER, LIKE X-MEN. THE PROFESSOR WOULD BE SO PROUD.
BUT YOU'RE RIGHT. NO GAMES. THAT'S FOR LATER.
THE GAMES ARE FOR WHEN I KILL YOU.

ALIEN FILTH! TELL ME NOW ABOUT YOUR "FINALITY."
HSSSS!!
GOOD LORD... FEEL THE HEAT ON THIS SIDE OF THE STATION. EVEN WITH THE FORCE FIELDS, IT'S LIKE WE'RE STANDING ON THE SURFACE OF THE SUN.
RACHEL, ARE YOU READING ME? WE'RE ON THE MAIN DECK AND ARE PROCEEDING TO THE CORE.
PRETENDER... YOUR END... IS NEAR.
HE IS NEAR...THE ELDEST COMES FOR YOU.
OH, HELL.


VZZZHHH

THE NOT-SHI'AR BROTHERS.
I AM PLEASED TO SEE YOU HAVE COME TOGETHER.

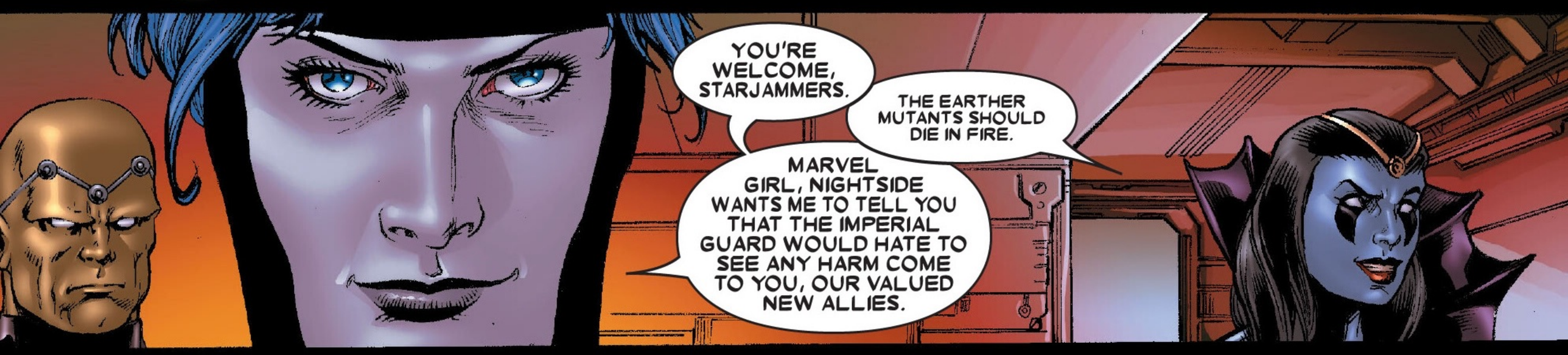
THIS WAY, YOU WILL NOT DIE ALONE.
BY THEIR OWN CHOICE, FINALITY WILL TAKE THE SHI'AR, MUCH LIKE *THEY* TOOK THE *CRYSTAL* FROM US. YOU WILL NOT STOP THIS.

PREPARE YOURSELVES, BROTHERS.

BOOM!
TOO MANY... TOO MANY TO KEEP TRACK OF.

YOU'RE DOING GREAT, RAY.
THEY'RE COMING AROUND AGAIN...I CAN'T--

KRA-KOOM!


YOU'RE WELCOME, STARJAMMERS.
THE EARTHER MUTANTS SHOULD DIE IN FIRE.
MARVEL GIRL, NIGHTSIDE WANTS ME TO TELL YOU THAT THE IMPERIAL GUARD WOULD HATE TO SEE ANY HARM COME TO YOU, OUR VALUED NEW ALLIES.

IT'S ORACLE...SHE'S STILL BLOCKING ME. I CAN'T READ VULCAN OR ANY OF THE GUARD.
THEY'VE GOT SOMETHING PLANNED, WE CAN'T JUST--
WE KNOW, WE JUST HAVE TO BE READY. STAY IN CONTACT WITH ALEX! TELL THE GUARD TO--
OH, NO... UNCLE ALEX--
THE ELDEST, HE'S HERE.

OKAY, PLAN "A" IS OVER.
CH'OD, GET US IN THERE, NOW!!

RRRAAAAAAA!!!

SHMM!

UHHH!

RACHEL, DO YOU HEAR ME? DON'T LET LORNA COME IN HERE!

VULCAN, TELL THE GUARD!

WHATEVER THEY DO, THEY HAVE TO BLOW UP THIS STA-- UHHH!

WITH ME ON IT? I DON'T THINK SO.

GUARD!! YOUR EMPEROR NEEDS YOU. TELEPORT TO MY POSITION, NOW!

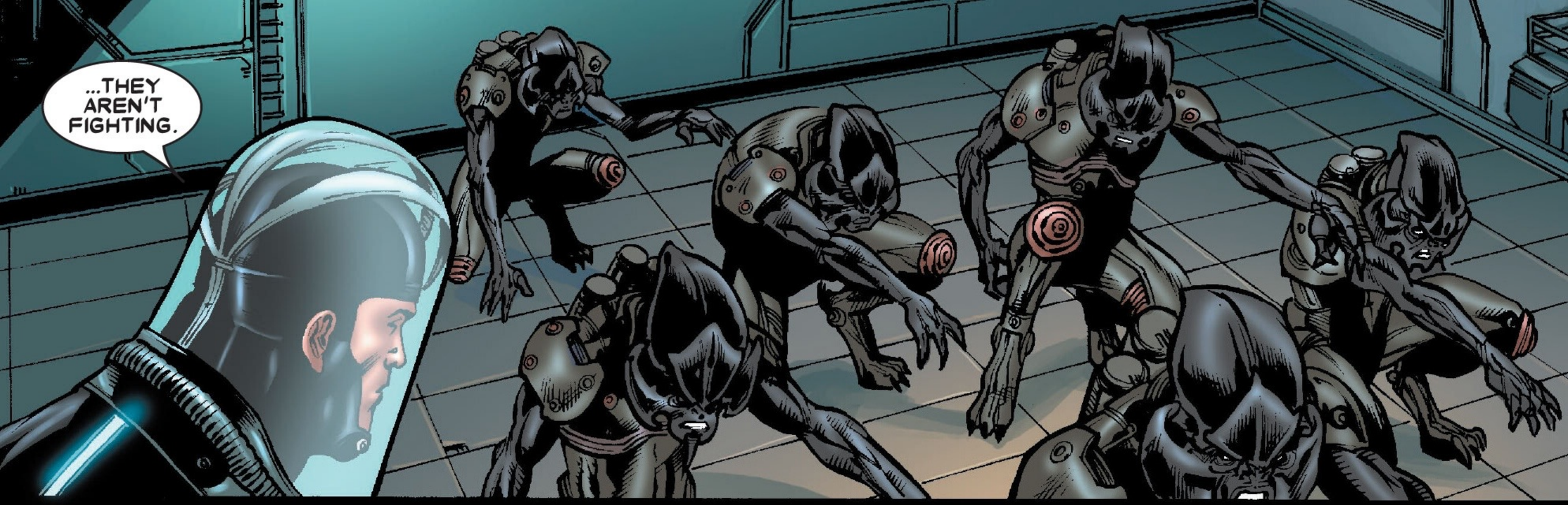
UFF!!

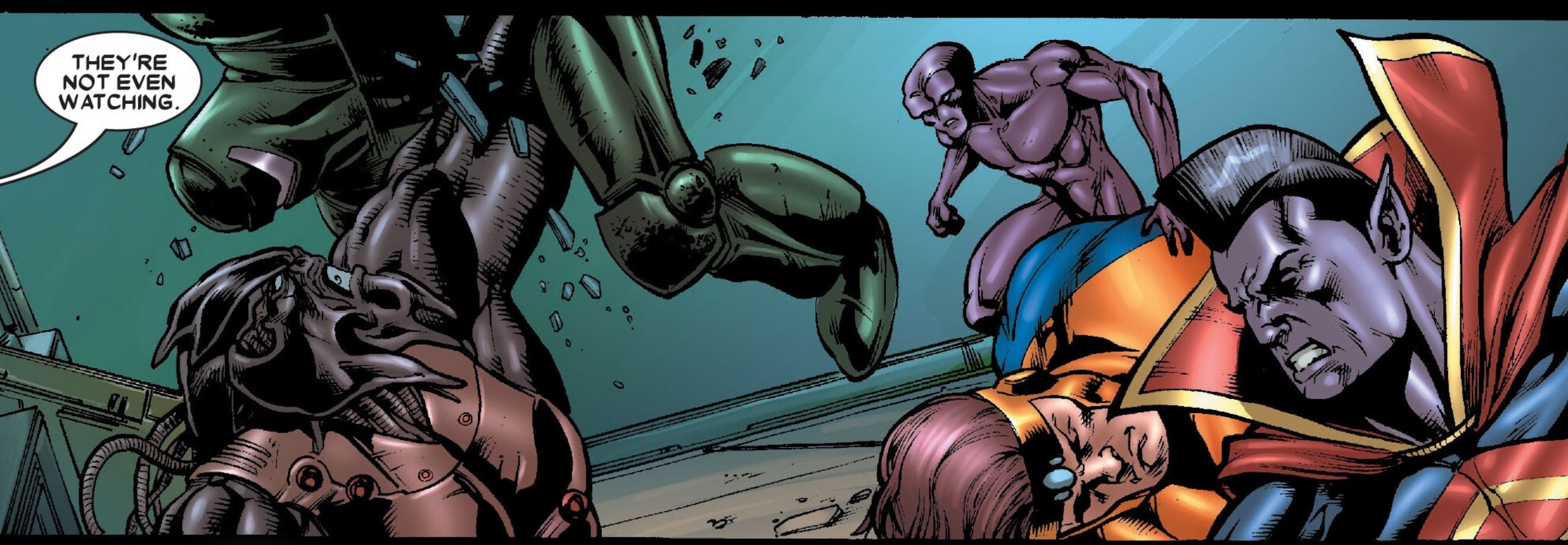
PROTECT THE EMPEROR!
MORE ALIEN PUPPETS? ARE THE M'KRAAN THE ONLY FREE PEOPLE IN THIS UNIVERSE?
THE END OF THE SHI'AR IS COMING. YOU ARE NOT-SHI'AR...YOU NEED NOT DIE WITH THEM.

WE ARE SHI'AR BY OUR *ACTIONS*, CREATURE.
AND THE EMPIRE WILL NOT FALL WHILE THE IMPERIAL GUARD STANDS.

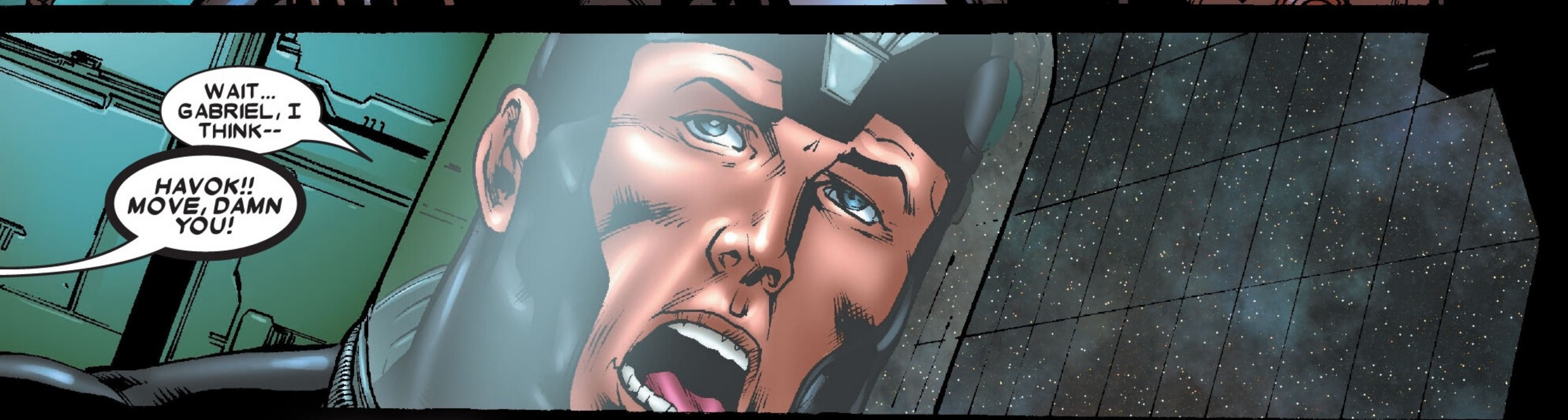
TO DEFEND THOSE WHO ENSLAVE YOU IS MADNESS!
THE END COMES FOR ALL THOSE WHO STAND WITH THE SHI'AR MURDERERS!

WILL SOMEONE BURN OUT HIS *TONGUE*!?
GABRIEL, SHUT UP! LOOK AT THE SCY'AR...


...THEY AREN'T FIGHTING.


THEY'RE NOT EVEN WATCHING.

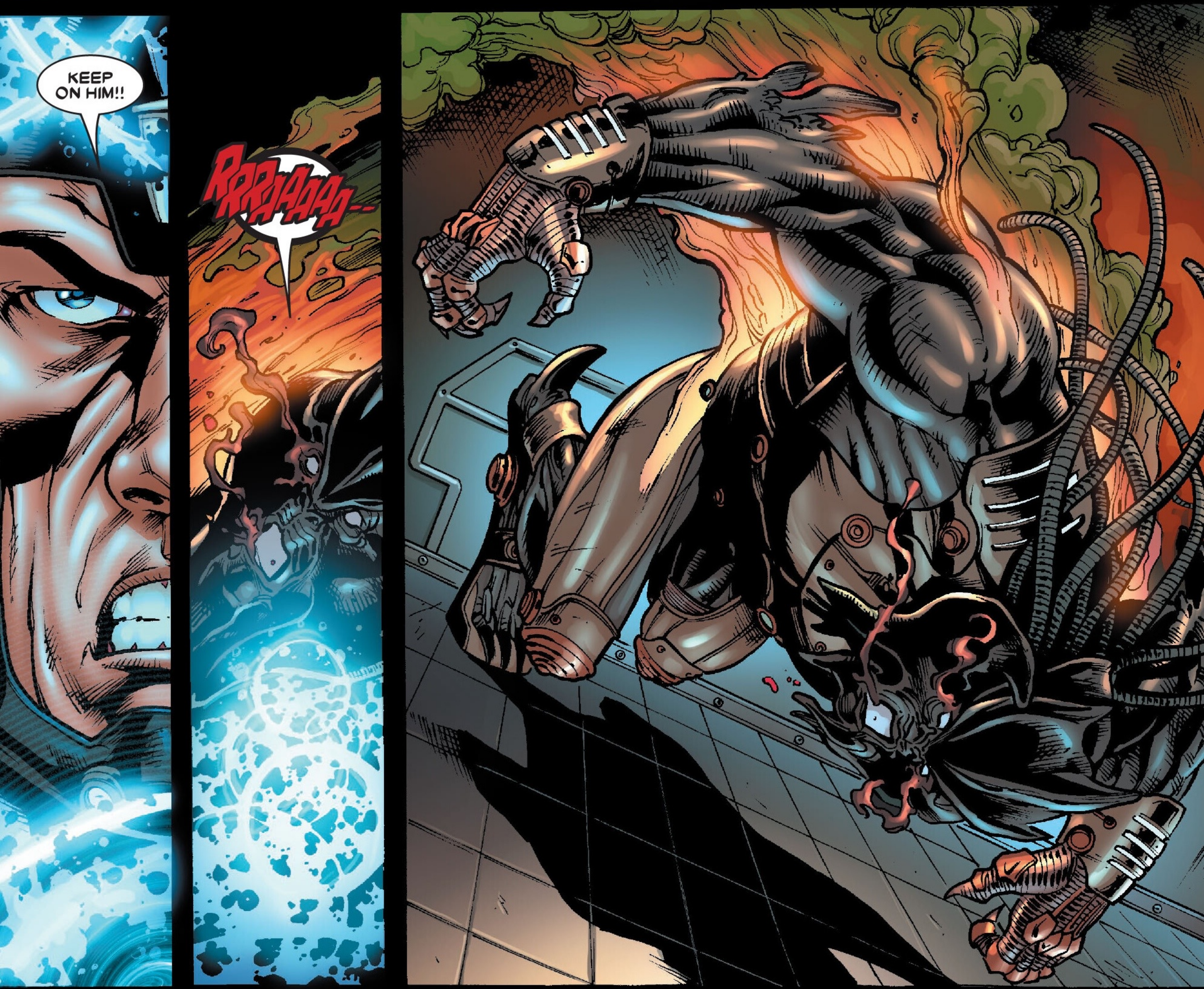
KRRKAAAAHHH!!!


WAIT... GABRIEL, I THINK--
HAVOK!! MOVE, DAMN YOU!

NO! VULCAN! GLADIATOR! WORK *TOGETHER!*
ATTACK AS ONE, FIRE ON THE SAME POINTS! TRY TO OVERLOAD HIM!

"REPORT."
"THE FLEET IS REPORTING SEVENTEEN PERCENT CASUALTIES, MAJOR GENERAL."
"AND THE SCY'AR TAL?"
"FOUR PERCENT, MAJOR GENERAL.
KA-THOOM!
"THE ETERNAL RAPTOR IS GONE, SIR!!
"SIR!!"
I HEARD YOU, CAPTAIN. MAINTAIN ORDERS. WE ARE ENGAGING THE SCY'AR TAL.
UNCLE? WHAT IS HAPPENING?
WHAT IS HAPPENING, NIECE?
THE SHI'AR EMPIRE IS BEING DEFEATED.

DON'T LET UP!!
AAARGHHH!


KEEP ON HIM!!
RRRAAAA--

WE'VE DONE IT. HE'S FINISHED.
THAT'S WHAT HE GETS FOR TOUCHING ME. THAT'S WHAT THEY ALL GET.
NO. IT'S NOT OVER. LOOK.

ELDEST.

BROTHERS...

ELDEST.

ELDEST.

ELDEST.

ELDEST.

ELDEST.

YOU SEEK TO BREAK OUR BROTHERHOOD, PUPPETS? THE M'KRAAN CANNOT BE BROKEN. THE END CANNOT BE STOPPED. WE WILL HAVE WHAT IS OURS.

VMMMM

OH, COME ON!!

YOU HAVE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME!!

AND THE SHI'AR WILL PAY.

UHH!!
WHAM!

EMPERAAAHHH!

GLADIATOR!
VULCAN, GET UP!!

"GET UP!!"

...KILL... THIS THING...
NO, STOP... LOOK AT HIM! USE YOUR POWER! THE OTHER SCY'AR, I THINK THEY'RE HELPING HIM SOMEHOW.
CAN YOU SEE ANY ENERGY? CAN YOU FEEL--

SHUT UP, I'M... WHAT?
THE ELDEST TAKES HIS POWER FROM HIS PEOPLE.
MAYBE HIS ENTIRE SPECIES.
LET'S SEE WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT THAT.
SCREAM, MONSTER.
AAAARRRGHHH!!!

AIIEEE!!!

NO... WHAT...

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE? I CANNOT FEEL MY BROTHERS!

ELDEST? WHAT IS HAPPENING? I DO NOT UNDERSTAND.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO? ARE... ARE YOU THE ELDEST?

NOT ANYMORE.

RACHEL, DO YOU HEAR ME? WHAT'S HAPPENING UP THERE?

"WHAT DID YOU DO, ALEX? IT'S LIKE THEY'VE LOST COMMUNICATIONS...THEY'RE STILL FIGHTING, BUT IT'S LIKE THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING ANYMORE!"

MAJOR GENERAL...

THE SITUATION IS THE SAME HERE, X-MAN. WHATEVER HAVOK AND VULCAN DID...

...IT JUST TURNED THE TIDE OF BATTLE.

LORNA... IF WE JUST WON...

ALEX... *ALEX!!*

LORNA, I JUST LOST COMMUNICATION WITH ALEX!!

TELEPORT HIM OUT OF THERE! *RIGHT NOW!*

SOMETHING IS JAMMING OUR SENSORS... I CAN'TGET A LOCK.

VULCAN'S MAKING HIS MOVE. WE HAVE TO GET DOWN THERE RIGHT--

HRM. NEW PROBLEM.

"PERHAPS HAVOK NEEDS TO BE RESCUING US, YES?"

THERE CAN BE PEACE, ELDEST. TALK TO US.
CALL OFF YOUR PEOPLE. IF THE SHI'AR TRULY TOOK THE CRYSTAL FROM YOU, WE CAN WORK SOMETHING ...
OH, PLEASE. THE CRYSTAL WAS NEVER THEIRS. THEIR HOMES THE SHI'AR SCOUTS DESTROYED? THEY WERE ARTIFICIAL MOONS. I READ THE FILE.
THE M'KRAAN FOUND THE CRYSTAL, JUST LIKE THE SHI'AR DID. THEY JUST WEREN'T STRONG ENOUGH TO KEEP IT.
BUT I AM.
NO ONE THREATENS MY EMPIRE!
NO! DAMN YOU!!
I TOOK CARE OF THAT MYSELF, DIDN'T YOU KNOW?

SEE YOU IN HELL, ALEX.
NOW... LET'S SHOW THE SCY'AR WHO THEY MESSED WITH.
LET'S SHOW THEM WHAT FINALITY REALLY MEANS.

X-MEN: EMPEROR VULCAN 5

THE STARJAMMER.
OUTSIDE THE KA'LEB MOLECULAR CLOUD.

...NOT AGAIN... THIS ISN'T HAPPENING AGAIN...

LORNA...

LORNA...

POLARIS!!

THREE SHI'AR WARBIRDS HAVE JUST JUMPED IN...THE LEAD SHIP IS FIRING...

THE IMPERIAL GUARD APPROACHES. THAT BE ELECTRON LEADING THE CHARGE...FELT HIS STING BEFORE, I HAVE.

I CAN'T CONCENTRATE... ORACLE'S STILL INTERFERING...BUT THERE ARE MORE OF THE GUARD COMING FOR US.

LORNA...

WHAT IS YOUR COMMAND, POLARIS? UNLESS YOU PLAN TO DECIDE POSTHUMOUSLY, YES?

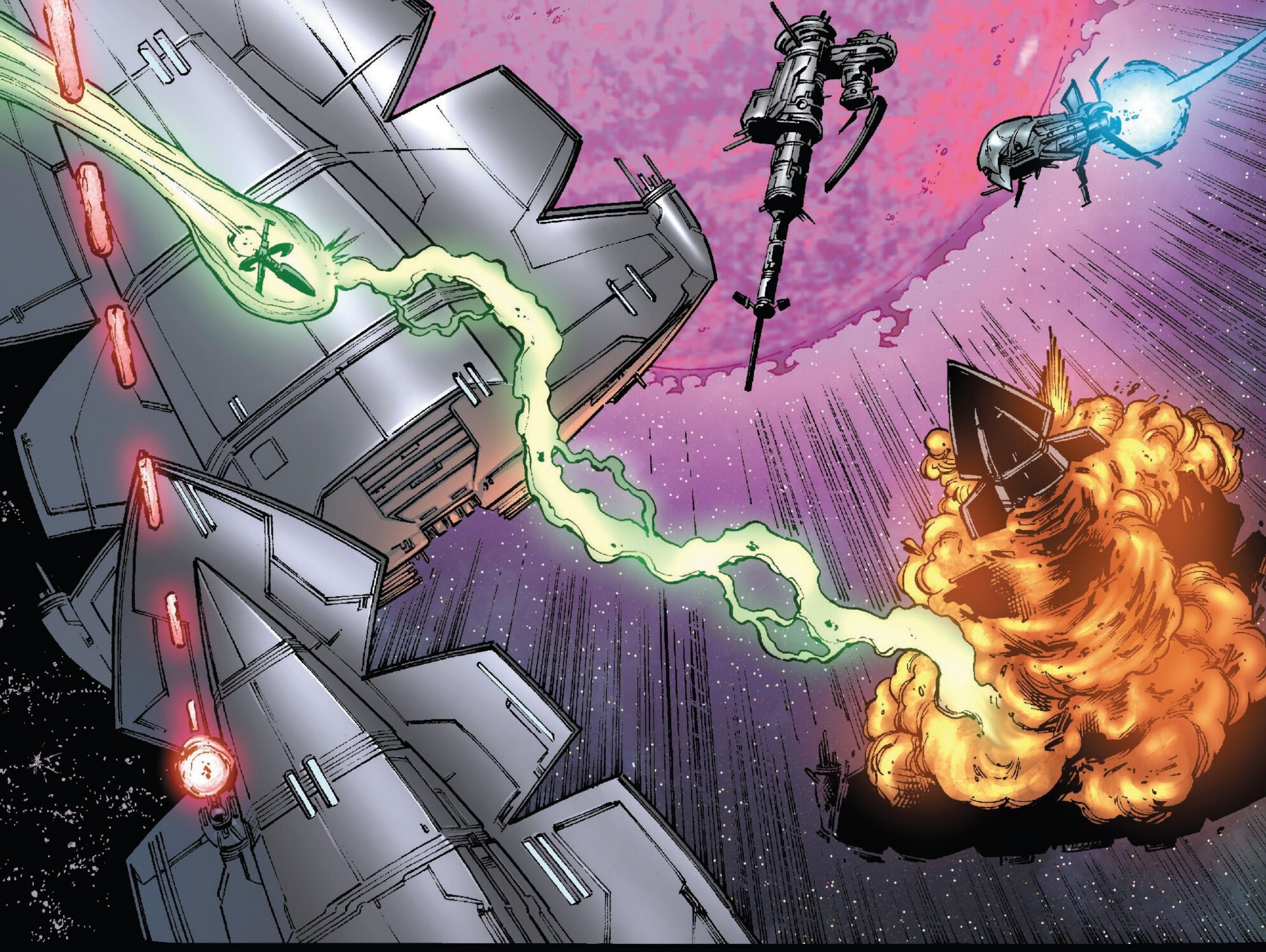
LORNA... I CAN'T SENSE ALEX. I CAN'T FEEL HIM AT ALL.

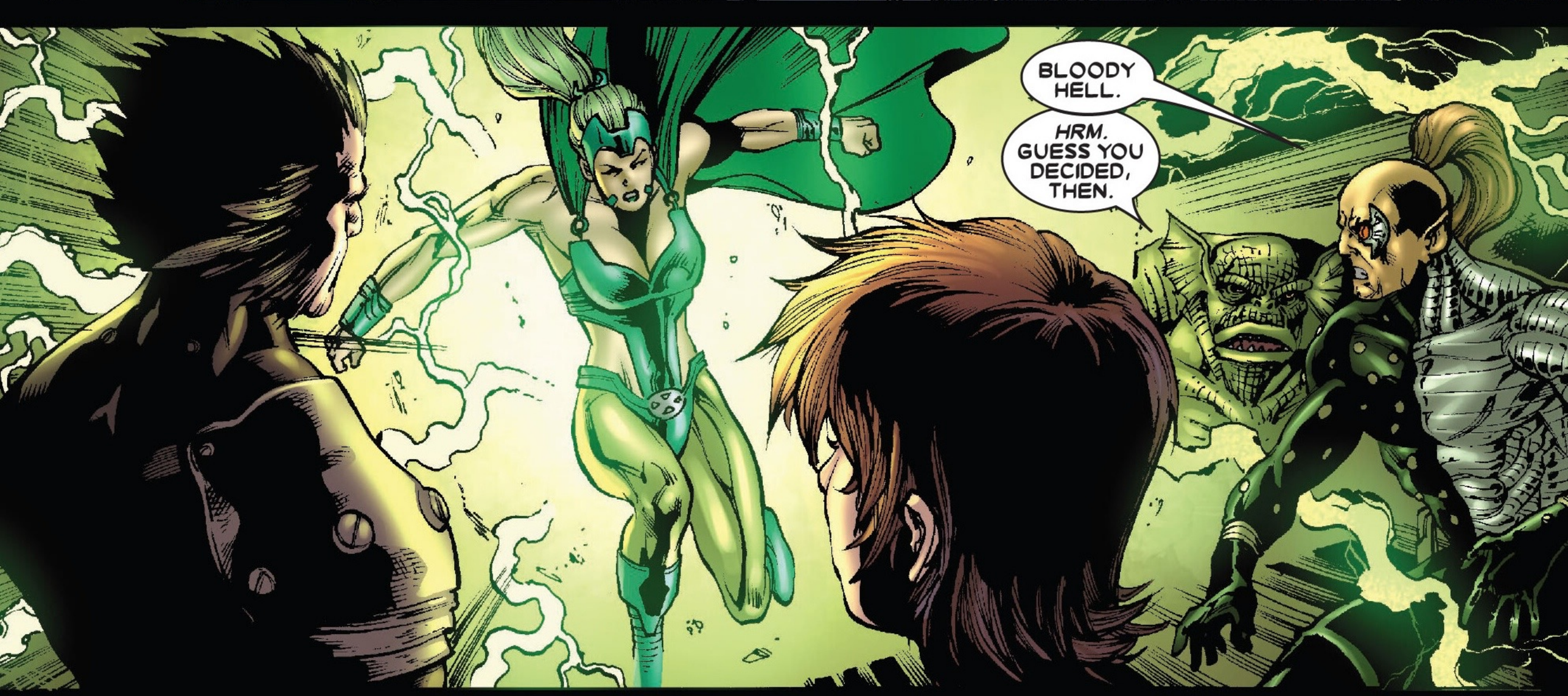
OH, GOD, I THINK VULCAN KI--

NO.

THAT'S NOT GOING TO HAPPEN.

VMMMMMM

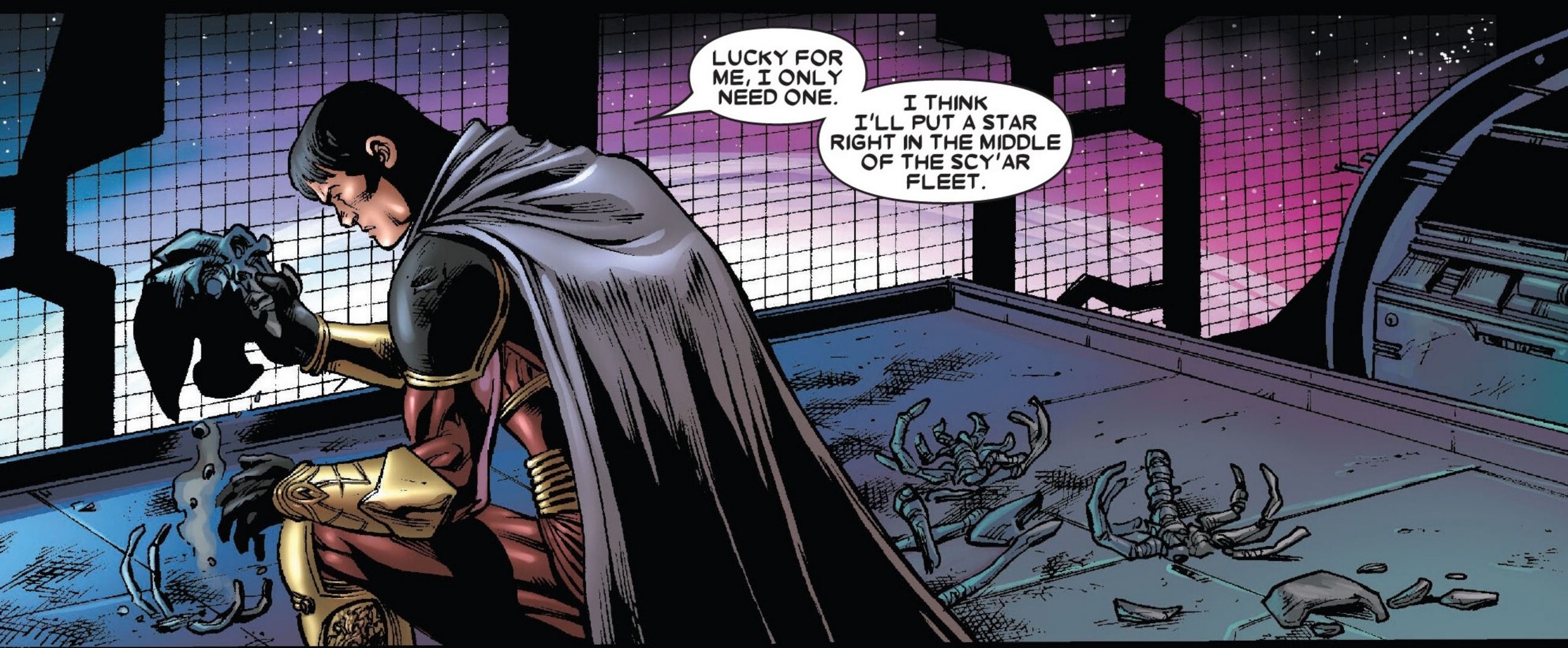



BLOODY HELL.
HRM. GUESS YOU DECIDED, THEN.

WE DESTROY FINALITY, THAT'S THE PLAN. EVEN IF WE HAVE TO KILL EVERY SINGLE MEMBER OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD TO DO IT.
AND IF VULCAN'S EVEN *TOUCHED* ALEX...
...HE BELONGS TO ME.

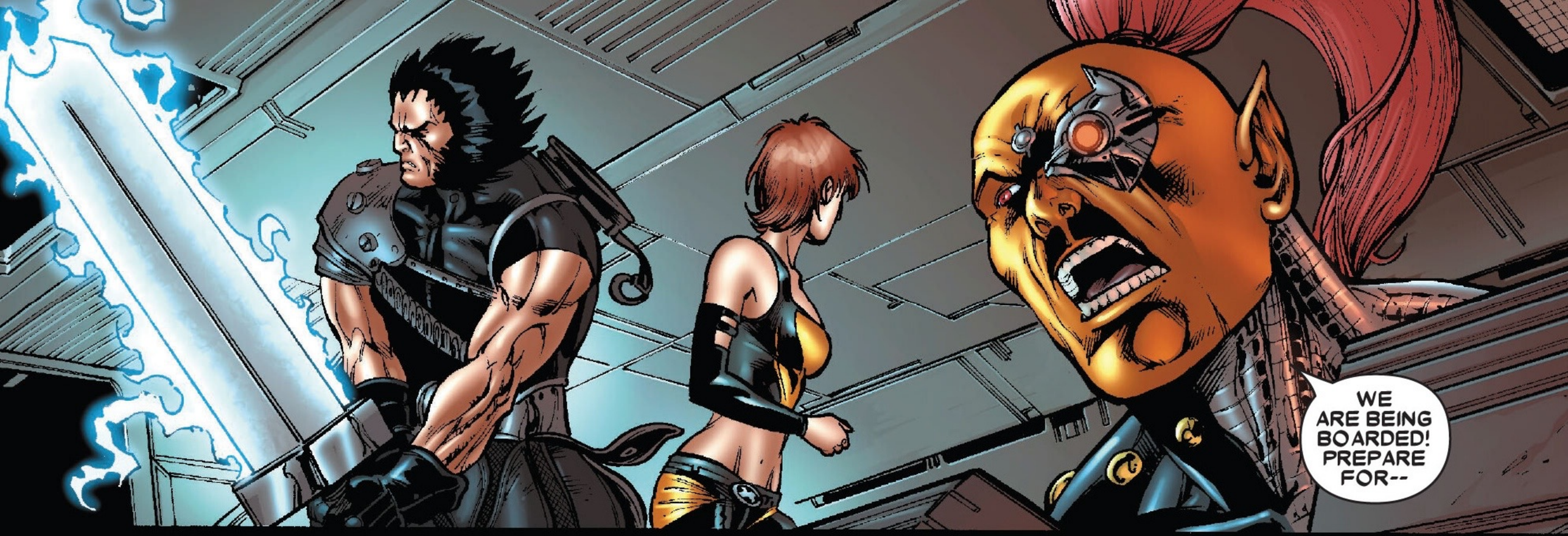
FINALITY STATION.
JUST MAKE IT WORK!

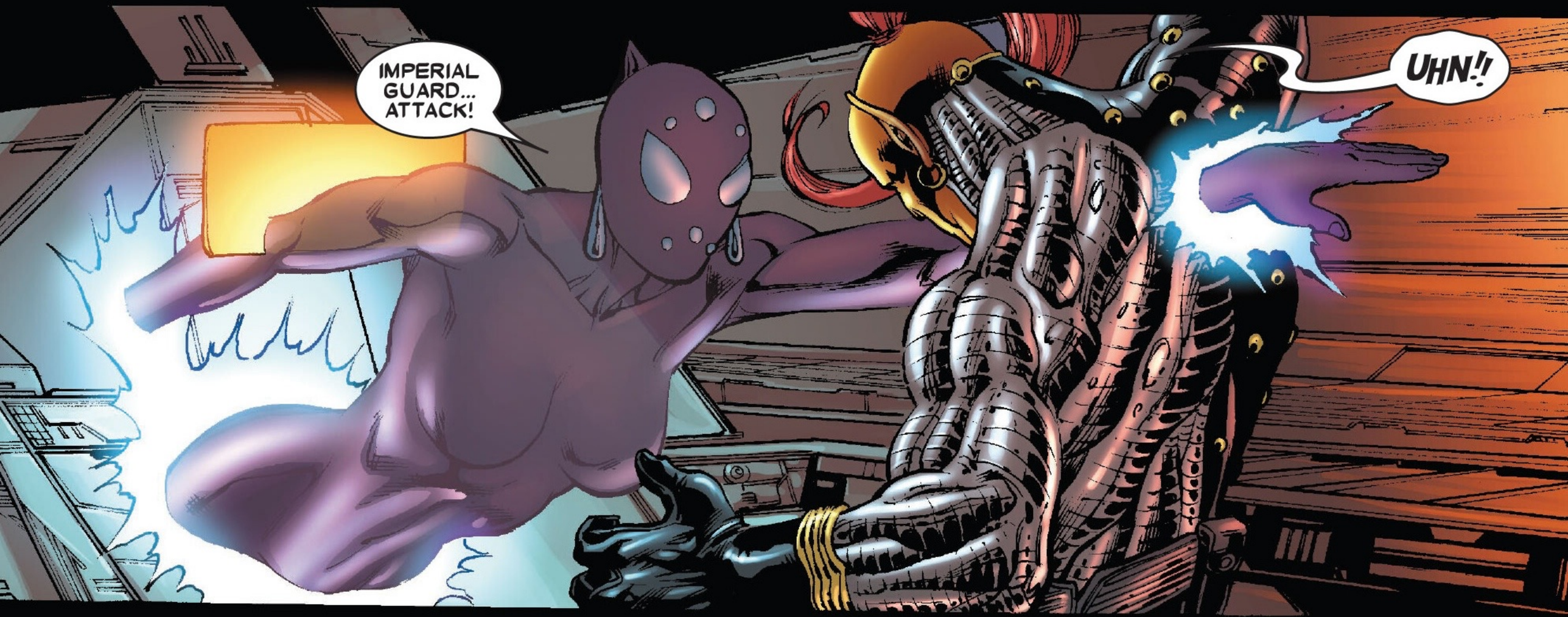
ANALYZING.
THE MECHANISM IS BASED ON SHI'AR TECHNOLOGY, LORD EMPEROR...BUT THE SCY'AR UPGRADES ARE FAR MORE ADVANCED THAN ANYTHING WE HAVE.
THE ENTIRE STATION IS AN ENGINE, WHICH POWERS THE WARPGATES... IT WOULD TAKE ME DECADES TO REPRODUCE IT.


LUCKY FOR ME, I ONLY NEED ONE.
I THINK I'LL PUT A STAR RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SCY'AR FLEET.

EMPEROR...THE SCY'AR TAL FLEET IS APPROACHING THE M'KRAAN WORLD. WE DON'T KNOW THE RAMIFICATIONS TO--

I WANT EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM DEAD.
SO FIRE THE DAMN WEAPON.


WE ARE BEING BOARDED! PREPARE FOR--


IMPERIAL GUARD... ATTACK!
UHN!!

KORVUS! MARVEL GIRL! TAKE THEM!!
SHRACK!
AAHHH!

BE CAREFUL, YES? I WOULD LIKE TO AVOID ANY SUDDEN EXPLOSIVE DECOMPRESSION.
RACHEL, BEHIND YOU!
OR WE CAN WORRY ABOUT YOUR GIRLFRIEND.

FWASH!
FINALITY HAS FIRED A MISSILE...IT'S A TRACER, THE SAME AS FEATHER'S EDGE!
IT'S OPENING A WARPGATE...HRM. IT'S GOING TO THE M'KRAAN WORLD. THAT SEEMS... UNFORTUNATE.

DAMMIT! HE'S USING THE WEAPON!
RAY, KORVUS...FOLLOW IT! STOP IT FROM REACHING THE WORLD!

WHAT?! WE CAN'T LEAVE YOU LIKE THIS, THE GUARD IS--

LET ME WORRY ABOUT THE GUARD.

BUT--
YOU SAW WHAT FINALITY DID TO FEATHER'S EDGE, WE CAN'T LET THAT HAPPEN TO THE CRYSTAL.
GO. NOW!

THE STARCHILDE AND KORVUS ROOK'SHIR HAVE BROKEN OFF FROM THE STARJAMMER. THEY'RE ENTERING THE WARPGATE AFTER THE TRACER SHIP.
GO AFTER THEM, GLADIATOR.
KILL THEM BOTH.
SEND THE ENTIRE GUARD IN AFTER THE STARJAMMER.
AS YOU COMMAND.
LOOK AT ME NOW, XAVIER.
THE SHI'AR MADE ME A SLAVE, NOW I RULE THEM. YOU SENT ME TO DIE...AND SOON I'LL BE COMING TO KILL YOU.
I'LL SHOW THE WHOLE *UNIVERSE* WHAT POWER IS.
SHAKK!

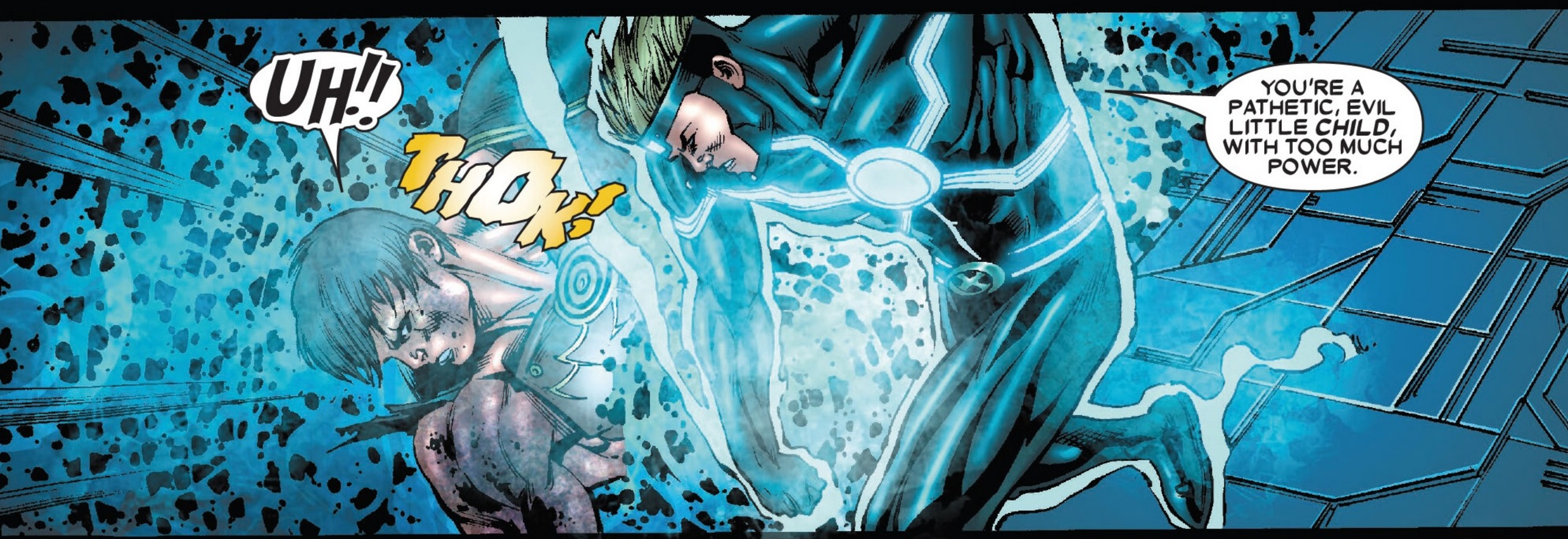
AAAAAHHHH!!
NO... CAN'T BE...
YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT POWER IS, GABRIEL?
LET ME SHOW YOU.

CHRISTIANE I
KRA-KOOOM!
THEY ARE RETREATING?
THE SCY'AR ARE IN CHAOS, BUT THEY'RE STILL DANGEROUS. THEY APPEAR TO BE GATHERING AT THE EDGE OF THE SYSTEM, TRYING TO REGROUP.
SIR!! A STARGATE JUST OPENED... SOMETHING CAME THROUGH.
IDENTIFY, CAPTAIN.
SIR... IT'S A TRACER SHIP. FROM *FINALITY*.
VULCAN... HE INTENDS TO EXTERMINATE US ALL.
DOES HE? CAPTAIN... WHERE IS THE TRACER GOING?
COMPUTING... SIR, THE TRACER IS HEADING FOR THE CENTER OF THE SCY'AR FLEET.
THERE IT IS, KORVUS! IS HE INSANE? TO ACTUALLY TRY AND DESTROY THE M'KRAAN CRYSTAL?
HE IS FILLED WITH *HATE*, NOT INSANITY... LOOK WHERE IT'S HEADING.
THE SCY'AR...

ALMOST GOT IT...
ALMOST--
UHN!!
YOU HAVE NOTHING, HUMAN.
WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS, GLADIATOR? HOW CAN YOU FOLLOW VULCAN? YOU KNOW THE THRONE BELONGS TO LILANDRA!
THE THRONE BELONGS TO THE SHI'AR, NOT ANY ONE PERSON. AND THE THRONE HAS ORDERED YOUR DEATH.
KORVUS, STOP THE TRACER...
...I'VE GOT THIS.

"THE PROFESSOR TOLD ME THAT I MAY NEVER KNOW THE UPPER LIMIT OF MY POWER.
"HE NEVER THOUGHT TO THROW ME INTO A STAR."
YOU THINK YOU CAN TAKE ME NOW?
YOU'RE NOTHING! I'M A GOD!
HNN!
A GOD? NO...YOU'RE JUST...A MAN.
SHOOOM!
HNNN!

AAAARGGHHH!!
AND I'VE ABSORBED ENOUGH POWER NOW TO MAKE YOU BURN.


UH!!
THOK!
YOU'RE A PATHETIC, EVIL LITTLE CHILD, WITH TOO MUCH POWER.

KILL... YOU...

THUD!
LIKE YOU KILLED OUR FATHER? LIKE YOU KILLED BANSHEE?
NO. YOU'RE DONE. NOW YOU PAY!

THOOOM!
"WE'VE JUST LOST THE STARBOARD ENGINE!!"
"RAZA, BEHIND YOU!!"
WARNED TOO LATE.
AARRGHH!!
AIIIEE!!
SHRACK!
GET AWAY FROM HIM!!
HUHN... HUHN...
THUNK!
CORRECTING FOR ENGINE LOSS.
GET US TO THAT STATION, CH'OD. WE HAVE TO DESTROY IT, NO MATTER WHAT.
HRM. TELEPORTATION IN PROGRESS.
MORE IMPERIAL GUARD?
NO. ALL OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD.
ANY THOUGHTS?
$@%*.

RRRAAAA!!
UHN!!!
"AMAZING. RACHEL IS ACTUALLY FIGHTING GLADIATOR TO A STANDSTILL."
"AND KORVUS WILL REACH THE TRACER IN TIME."
THANK THE GODS, VULCAN'S MADNESS WILL BE STOPPED.
WE CAN ROUTE THE REMAINING SCY'AR TAL AND THEN GIVE BACKUP TO THE STARJAMMERS...
NIECE... FORGIVE ME.
CAPTAIN. ON MY MARK...
"FIRE!!"
SHRACK!

KORVUS!!
BY SHARRA... UNCLE, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?! FINALITY WILL FIND IT'S MARK. YOU'VE CONDEMNED NOT ONLY THE SCY'AR, BUT ALL OF REALITY!
THE M'KRAAN CRYSTAL...
THE CRYSTAL IS A GIFT FROM THE GODS, NIECE. I HAVE FAITH THAT IT WILL WEATHER THIS STORM.
THE SCY'AR TAL WILL NOT.
ARGHH!!!
NO!!!
TRACER SIGNAL IS BEING RECEIVED.

STARGATE COORDINATES LOCKED.
HNN... EMPEROR...
SHIK!
ARGH!!
NOW IT ENDS.
YOU DON'T... HAVE THE STONES...
X-MEN... DON'T... KILL...
DIDN'T YOU HEAR? I QUIT.
GOODBYE, GABRIEL.
SHMMM!
WHAT--?

GET YOUR FILTHY HANDS OFF MY HUSBAND.

OR I BEGIN DISEMBOWELING YOUR FRIENDS.

DO NOT DO THIS... PLEASE...
ON MY COMMAND... COMMENCE JUMP.
Commencing...
Panzo Scanner
Find815.com
Scanning...
FORGIVE ME...PLEASE FORGIVE ME...

"YOU HAVE A CHOICE, HAVOK."

KILL ME, AND WATCH YOUR LOVER DIE.

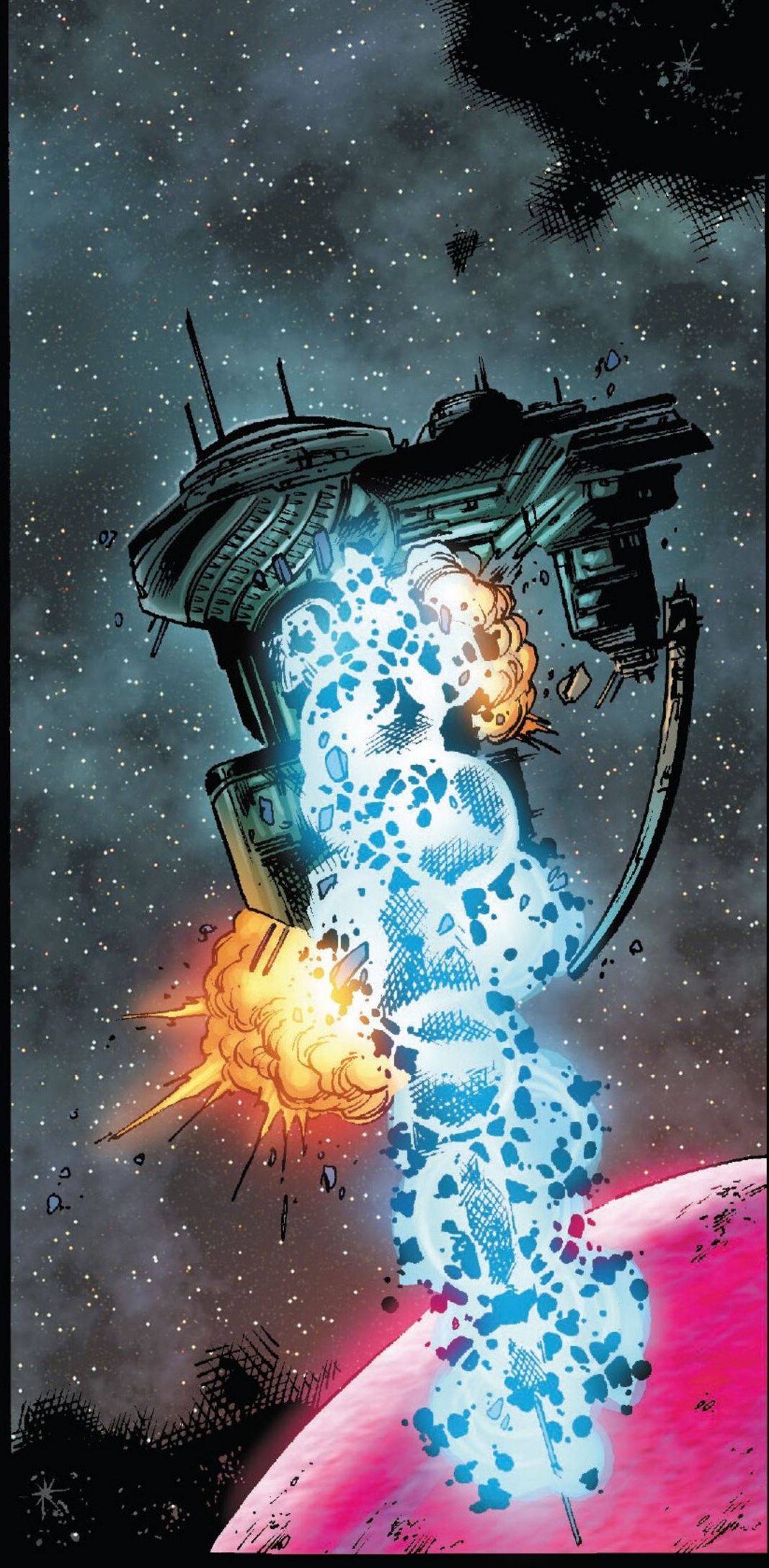
OR KNEEL BEFORE ME, AND PRAY FOR MY MERCY.

HAVOK... POLARIS WANTED ME TO GIVE YOU A MESSAGE, YES?

"THIS CAN ONLY END ONE WAY."

I KNOW.

CHOOOM!



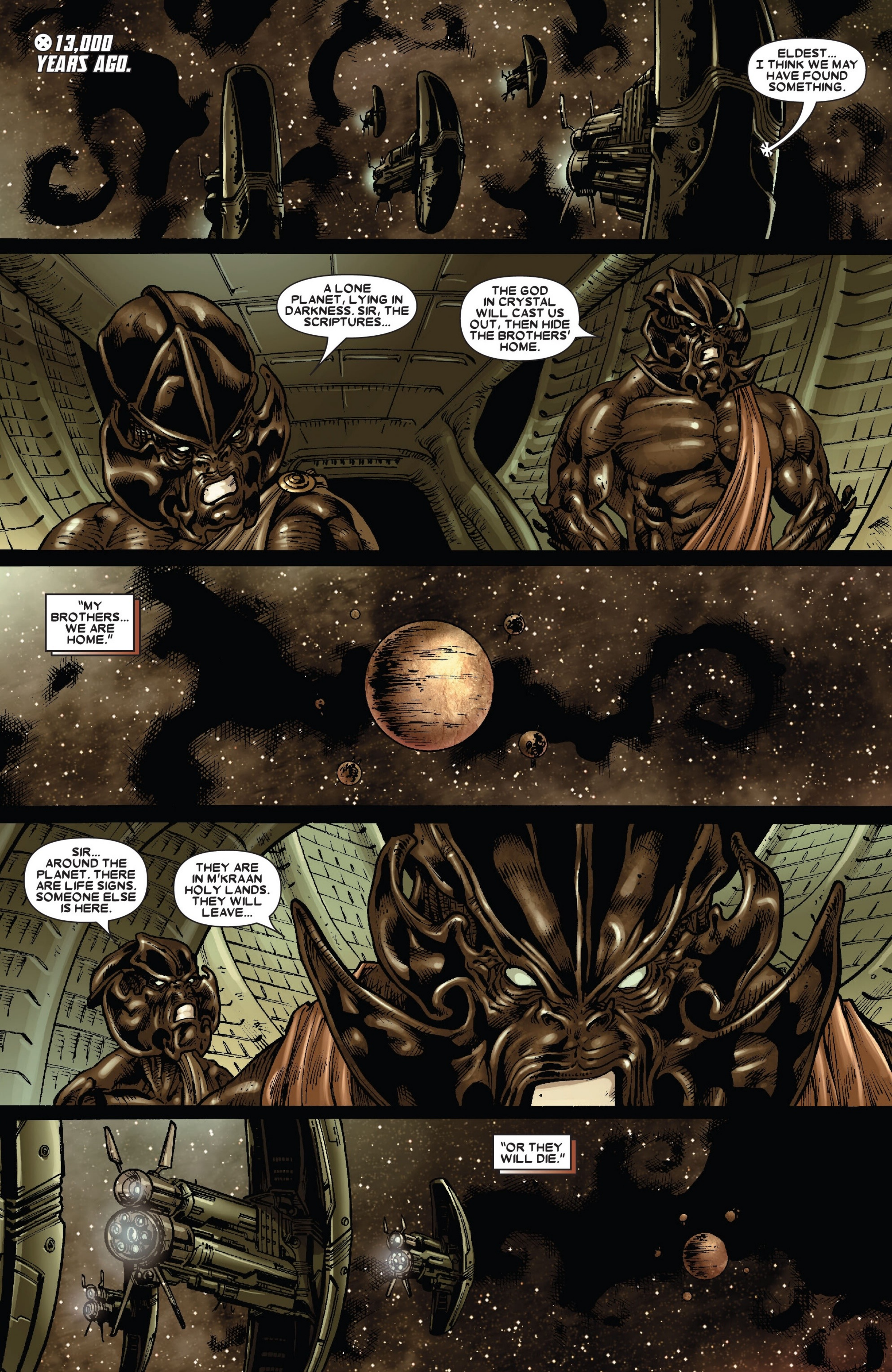
MENTOR! THE WEAPON...
DESTROYED, EMPEROR. THE ENTIRE STATION IS GOING TO EXPLODE!

YOU UNBELIEVABLE BASTARD. DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU COST ME? I SHOULD KILL YOU RIGHT HERE...
YOU *SHOULD* KILL ME NOW, GABRIEL. BECAUSE IF YOU DON'T, I'LL NEVER STOP COMING AFTER YOU. DO YOU HEAR ME? I'LL NEVER STOP.
...

GET US OUT OF HERE, CAL'SYEE. ALL OF US.

"RUN, NIECE."
EXCUSE ME?
TAKE AN ESCAPE POD. MARVEL GIRL AND KORVUS ARE NEARBY. RENDEZVOUS WITH THEM.
THE SHI'AR CIVIL WAR IS OVER, LILANDRA.
I AM TAKING VULCAN'S SIDE.
"VULCAN'S ACTIONS HAVE REVEALED HIS TRUE NATURE--
"THAT OF A SHI'AR. HE WAS WILLING TO DO WHATEVER IT TOOK TO PROTECT THE SHI'AR EMPIRE. UNDER HIS RULE, THE EMPIRE WILL FLOURISH.
"BUT YOU MUST RUN."

CHANDILAR, DAYS LATER.
THE SCY'AR THREAT HAS BEEN DESTROYED.
THE SHI'AR ARMADA HAS BEEN REUNITED.
VULCAN! VULCAN! VULCAN! VULCAN! VULCAN!
THE ENEMIES OF THE EMPIRE LIE AT OUR FEET, AND THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING, MY PEOPLE!
NOW THE EMPIRE'S DESTINY WILL BE FULFILLED!
WE WILL DESTROY ALL THOSE WHO WILL STAND IN OUR WAY, INCLUDING THE ONE YOU CALL MUMMUDRAI... THE ONE CALLED XAVIER.
TOGETHER WE WILL EXPAND... WE WILL CONQUER.
THE SHI'AR EMPIRE WILL RISE AGAIN!!


13,000 YEARS AGO.
ELDEST... I THINK WE MAY HAVE FOUND SOMETHING.
A LONE PLANET, LYING IN DARKNESS. SIR, THE SCRIPTURES...
THE GOD IN CRYSTAL WILL CAST US OUT, THEN HIDE THE BROTHERS' HOME.
"MY BROTHERS... WE ARE HOME."
SIR... AROUND THE PLANET. THERE ARE LIFE SIGNS. SOMEONE ELSE IS HERE.
THEY ARE IN M'KRAAN HOLY LANDS. THEY WILL LEAVE...
"OR THEY WILL DIE."

X-MEN: DIVIDED WE STAND 2

THE HOLE

HOME.

THE PLANET IS CALLED KR'KN AND IT'S SO FAR ON THE FRINGE I'M NOT EVEN SURE IT'S STILL IN THE SHI'AR EMPIRE.

BEEN HERE WEEKS OR MAYBE MONTHS. IT'S HARD TO KEEP TRACK OF TIME WHEN YOU'RE AT THE BOTTOM OF AN OCEAN.

I'M TOLD WE'RE NEARLY TWENTY MILES BENEATH THE SURFACE. THAT'S ABOUT ***THREE TIMES DEEPER*** THAN EARTH'S MARIANA TRENCH.

NO LIGHT, LITTLE FOOD, TOTAL ISOLATION.

MY BROTHER ***VULCAN*** DEFEATED ME AND MY TEAM AND NOW HE'S OUT RULING AN INTERGALACTIC EMPIRE.

I USED TO THINK ABOUT KILLING THE EVIL BASTARD, BUT NOW... I CAN'T SEEM TO THINK AT ALL.

I'M NOT ***SUPPOSED*** TO BE IN THIS HOLE.

I'M NOT ***SUPPOSED*** TO BE THE COMMANDER OF A MUTANT BATTALION.

I'M NOT EVEN SUPPOSED TO BE A ***SOLDIER.***

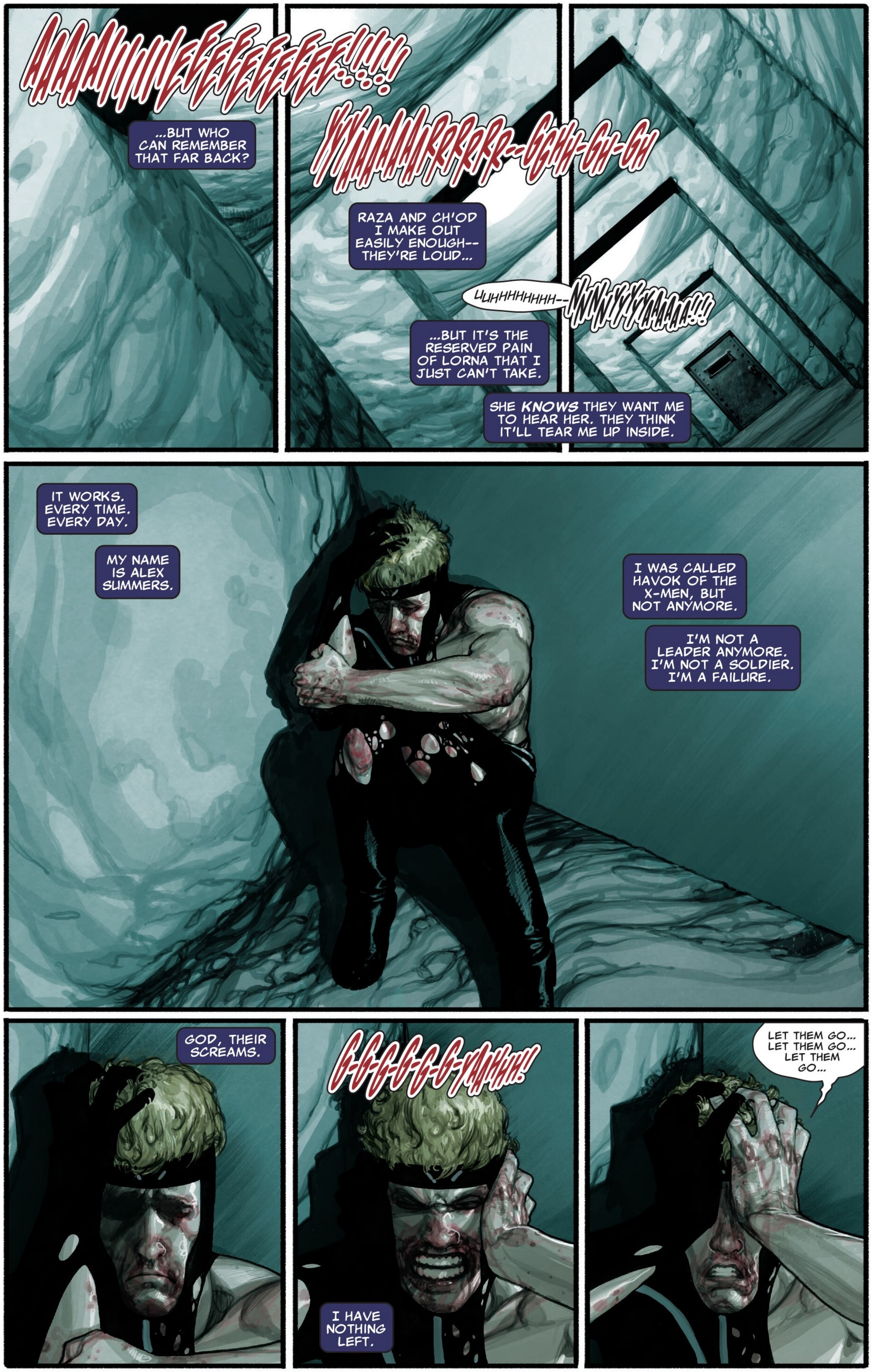
I'M ***SUPPOSED*** TO BE IN THE MOUNTAINS OF ARIZONA.

I WAS A ***STUDENT*** THERE...

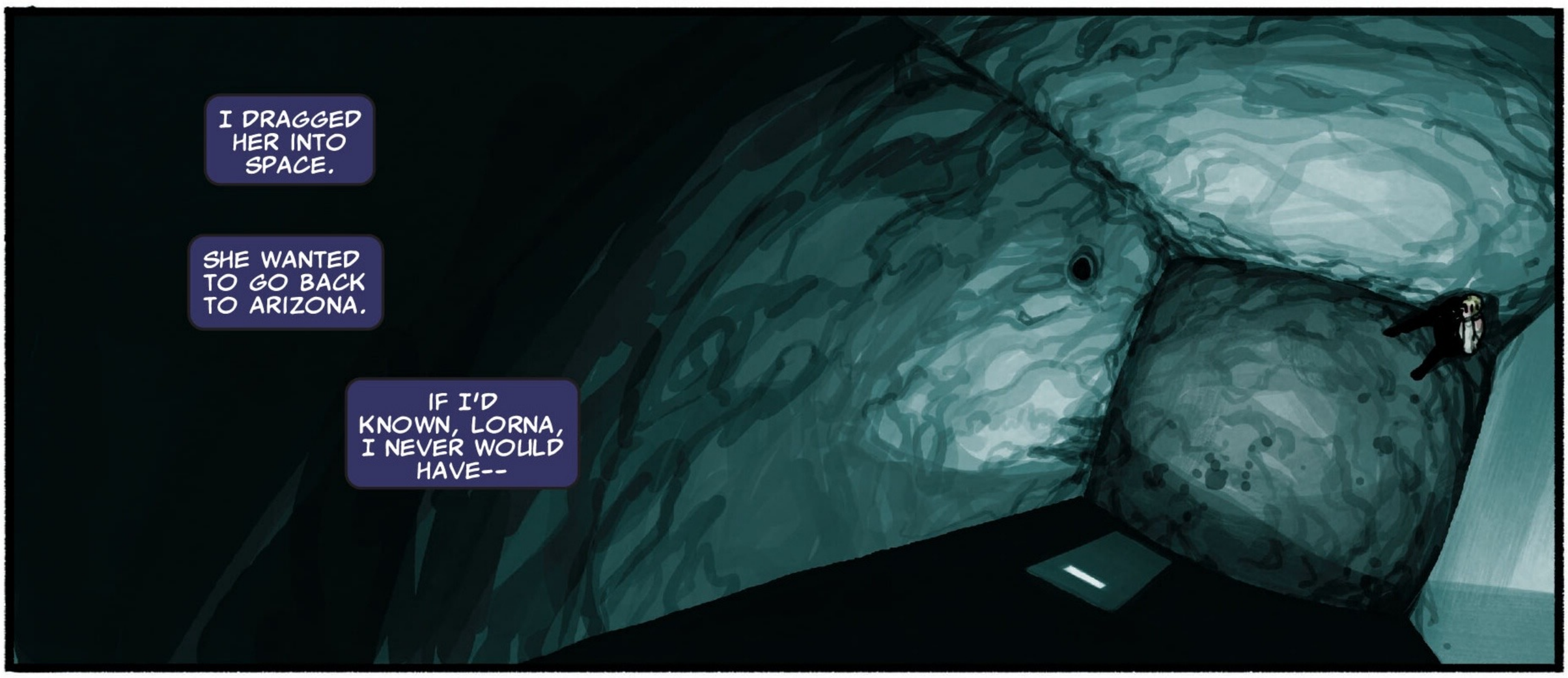
GYAA!

GYAA!

NNYYAAARRG!

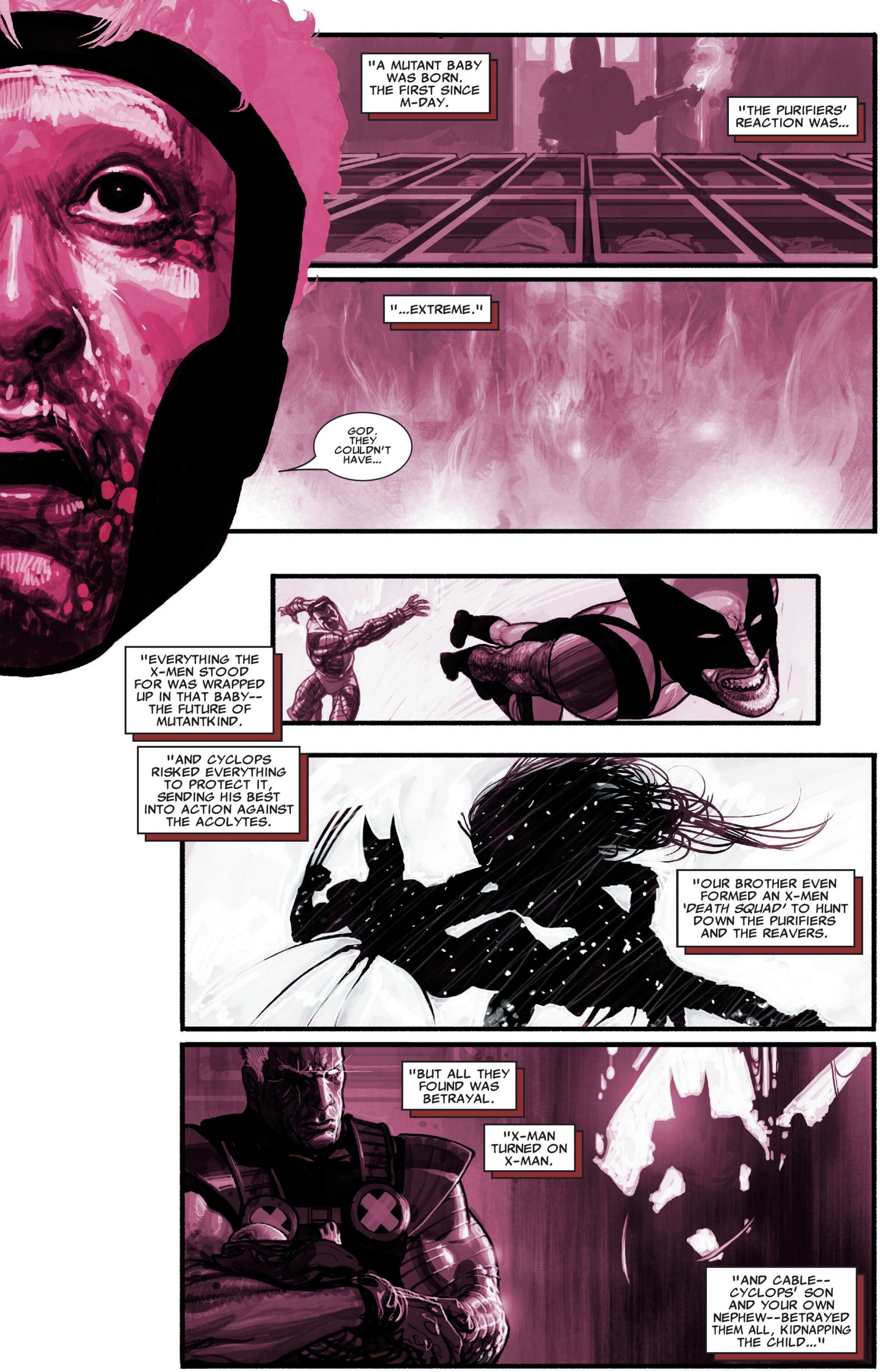

AAAAAIIIIIEEEEEEEEEE!!!!!
...BUT WHO CAN REMEMBER THAT FAR BACK?
YYYAAAAAAARRRRR--GGHH-GH-GH
RAZA AND CH'OD I MAKE OUT EASILY ENOUGH-- THEY'RE LOUD...
UHHHHHHHH--NNNYYYAAAAA!!!
...BUT IT'S THE RESERVED PAIN OF LORNA THAT I JUST CAN'T TAKE.
SHE KNOWS THEY WANT ME TO HEAR HER. THEY THINK IT'LL TEAR ME UP INSIDE.
IT WORKS. EVERY TIME. EVERY DAY.
MY NAME IS ALEX SUMMERS.
I WAS CALLED HAVOK OF THE X-MEN, BUT NOT ANYMORE.
I'M NOT A LEADER ANYMORE. I'M NOT A SOLDIER. I'M A FAILURE.
GOD, THEIR SCREAMS.
G-G-G-G-G-G-YAAHHH!
I HAVE NOTHING LEFT.
LET THEM GO... LET THEM GO... LET THEM GO...

LORNA...
SO FAR REMOVED FROM THE SOURCE OF MY POWERS, I CAN'T PROTECT HER. I CAN'T EVEN HELP HER.


I DRAGGED HER INTO SPACE.
SHE WANTED TO GO BACK TO ARIZONA.
IF I'D KNOWN, LORNA, I NEVER WOULD HAVE--

ALEX.
UNH--!

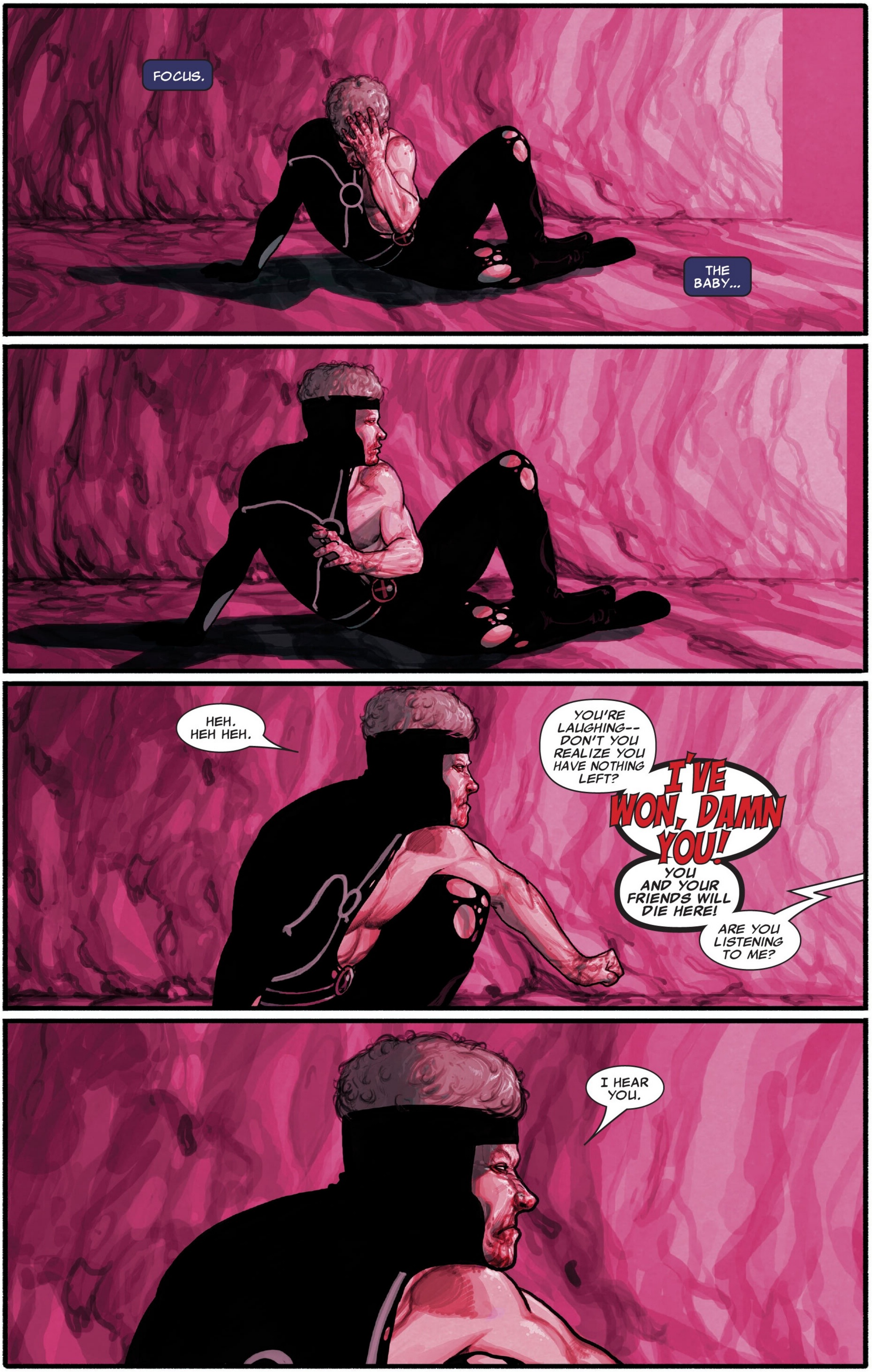
I BRING NEWS FROM HOME.
LET THEM GO, VULCAN...LET THEM--
OH, MY. TELL ME YOU'RE NOT BROKEN ALREADY?
I'M EMBARRASSED FOR YOU, ALEX.
BUT YOU ARE MY BLOOD. AND SO YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW ABOUT OUR ELDEST BROTHER AND WHAT HE'S DONE...


"A MUTANT BABY WAS BORN. THE FIRST SINCE M-DAY.
"THE PURIFIERS' REACTION WAS...
"...EXTREME."
GOD. THEY COULDN'T HAVE...
"EVERYTHING THE X-MEN STOOD FOR WAS WRAPPED UP IN THAT BABY--THE FUTURE OF MUTANTKIND.
"AND CYCLOPS RISKED EVERYTHING TO PROTECT IT, SENDING HIS BEST INTO ACTION AGAINST THE ACOLYTES.
"OUR BROTHER EVEN FORMED AN X-MEN 'DEATH SQUAD' TO HUNT DOWN THE PURIFIERS AND THE REAVERS.
"BUT ALL THEY FOUND WAS BETRAYAL.
"X-MAN TURNED ON X-MAN.
"AND CABLE--CYCLOPS' SON AND YOUR OWN NEPHEW--BETRAYED THEM ALL, KIDNAPPING THE CHILD..."

"SOME WENT MAD. BISHOP TRIED TO SLAUGHTER THE CHILD.
"IT WAS TOO MUCH, TOO FAST. SCOTT COULDN'T HANDLE IT...

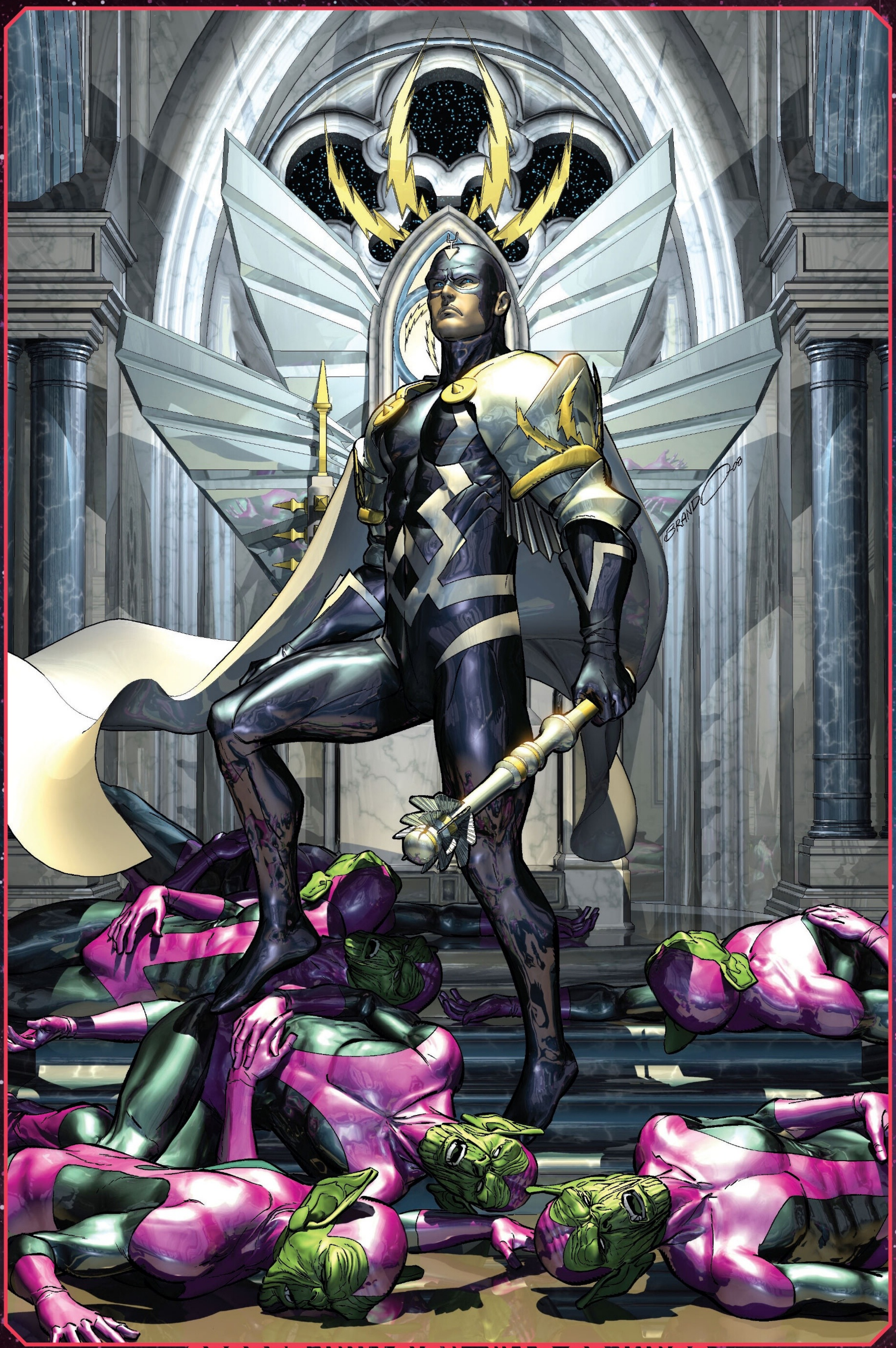
"THE X-MEN FELL.
"AND I GOT MY HEART'S DESIRE."
THIS CAN'T BE...

"CHARLES XAVIER IS DEAD."
SHUT UP.
"AND THE BABY WAS LOST.
"THE FUTURE OF THE X-MEN-- EVERYTHING THEY PINNED THEIR HOPES AND DESIRES ON...
"...DIED!"
SHUT UP!

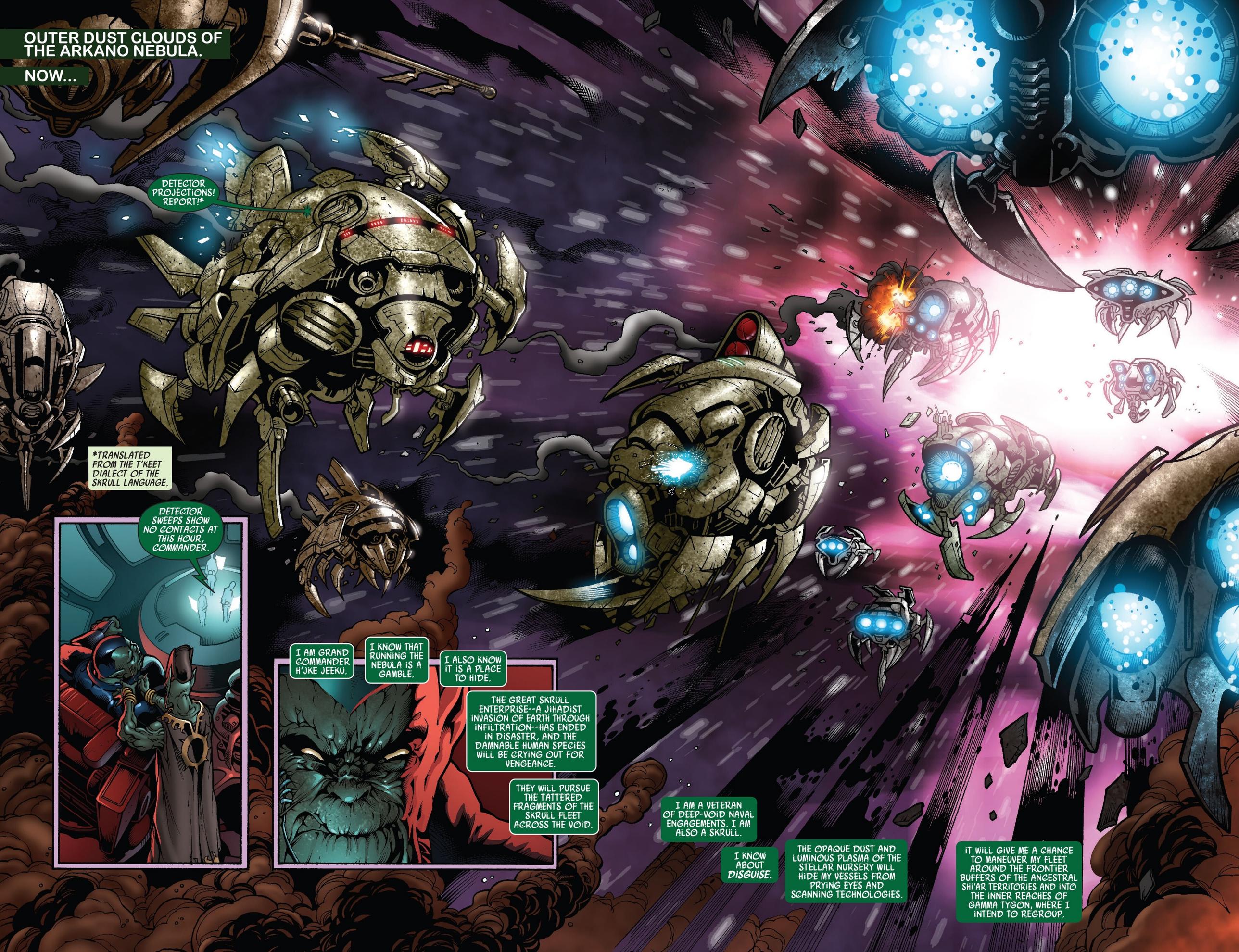

FOCUS.
THE BABY...
HEH. HEH HEH.
YOU'RE LAUGHING-- DON'T YOU REALIZE YOU HAVE NOTHING LEFT?
I'VE WON, DAMN YOU!
YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS WILL DIE HERE!
ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME?
I HEAR YOU.

XAVIER'S DEAD. THE X-MEN, DISBANDED.
IT DOESN'T MATTER.
YOU MISSED THE POINT. A NEW MUTANT MEANS A NEW FUTURE.
WE HAVE A FUTURE, GABRIEL.
LIFE PERSEVERES. IT FINDS A WAY TO BREAK THROUGH.
LIFE IS MEANINGLESS!
LIFE IS HOPE. THAT BABY IS HOPE! DON'T YOU SEE...
...IF THERE WAS ONE NEW MUTANT BORN... THERE WILL BE ANOTHER.
AND AS LONG AS I'M ALIVE, I KNOW I'LL GET TO YOU.
YOU SAY OUR BATTLE'S OVER. IT ISN'T.
NOT UNTIL WE STAND FACE-TO-FACE...

SMASH
...AND I RIP YOUR HEART OUT.



SECRET INVASION: WAR OF KINGS


OUTER DUST CLOUDS OF THE ARKANO NEBULA.
NOW...
DETECTOR PROJECTIONS! REPORT!*
*TRANSLATED FROM THE T'KEET DIALECT OF THE SKRULL LANGUAGE.
DETECTOR SWEEPS SHOW NO CONTACTS AT THIS HOUR, COMMANDER.
I AM GRAND COMMANDER H'JKE JEEKU.
I KNOW THAT RUNNING THE NEBULA IS A GAMBLE.
I ALSO KNOW IT IS A PLACE TO HIDE.
THE GREAT SKRULL ENTERPRISE--A JIHADIST INVASION OF EARTH THROUGH INFILTRATION--HAS ENDED IN DISASTER, AND THE DAMNABLE HUMAN SPECIES WILL BE CRYING OUT FOR VENGEANCE.
THEY WILL PURSUE THE TATTERED FRAGMENTS OF THE SKRULL FLEET ACROSS THE VOID.
I AM A VETERAN OF DEEP-VOID NAVAL ENGAGEMENTS. I AM ALSO A SKRULL.
I KNOW ABOUT DISGUISE.
THE OPAQUE DUST AND LUMINOUS PLASMA OF THE STELLAR NURSERY WILL HIDE MY VESSELS FROM PRYING EYES AND SCANNING TECHNOLOGIES.
IT WILL GIVE ME A CHANCE TO MANEUVER MY FLEET AROUND THE FRONTIER BUFFERS OF THE ANCESTRAL SHI'AR TERRITORIES AND INTO THE INNER REACHES OF GAMMA TYGON, WHERE I INTEND TO REGROUP.

I DO NOT THINK ABOUT THE DEFEAT MY PEOPLE HAVE JUST SUFFERED.

TO REVIEW PAST FAILURES IS AN INDULGENT WASTE OF TIME.

THE ONLY CONDITIONS THAT MATTER ARE "NOW" AND "NEXT".

I FOCUS MY MIND ON THE COMBAT-READINESS OF MY FLEET, THE REFINEMENT OF ITS TACTICAL FORMATION, THE STEADY HEARTBEAT RETURNS OF THE DETECTOR SYSTEMS.

STOP.

WHAT IS THAT?

COMMANDER, LET ME FINISH DRESSING YOUR WOUND. IT--

CAN WAIT, PRIEST.

WHAT IS THAT?

CONTACT, BEARING EIGHT EIGHT SEVEN TEN. IT HAS JUST APPEARED ON OUR SCREENS.

CONFIRMING SWEEP.

OBJECT IS TEN SEVENTEEN SUPERLIMINAL, DISTANCE FOUR THOUSAND A.U., APPROACHING US ON A MATCH COURSE.

IT HAS NO SUBSTANCE. I BELIEVE IT IS AN IMAGING ARTIFACT GENERATED BY THE NEBULA DUST.

YET IT HAS VELOCITY...

...IF IT IS A FALSE RETURN, WHY IS IT GAINING ON US?

FULL SENSORY ACQUISITION! COULD IT BE...
COULD IT BE HUMAN PURSUIT?
NEGATIVE. IF THAT IS A VESSEL, IT IS MOVING TOO FAST FOR--
I MEAN TO SAY, THE HUMANS ARE GENERATIONS AWAY FROM POSSESSING SUCH TECHNOLOGY.
IT IS UNDOUBTEDLY A COMET OR HYPERVELOCITY SUN-LET--
THAT JUST HAPPENS TO BE COMING STRAIGHT FOR US EVEN THOUGH WE ARE HIDDEN?
IT'S CLOSING SO FAST...
WHAT MANNER OF THING OVERTAKES A BATTLEGROUP MOVING AT SUPERLUMINAL?
SOUND COMBAT STATIONS!
ACTIVATE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SHIELD GRIDS!
ALL BATTERIES MAKE READY!
HELM! COME ABOUT ONE EIGHTY. PUT US BETWEEN THE FLEET AND WHATEVER THIS IS.
I WANT FIRING SOLUTIONS FROM ALL PRINCIPAL WEAPONS DECKS.
WE WILL BURN THEM IN THEIR TRACKS.

VISUAL! WE HAVE VISUAL!
COMMANDER, WE--
HE LOVES YOU. HE LOVES YOU.
WHAT IS THAT?
FIRE! ALL DECKS! ALL BATTERIES!
FIRE!

MMMMHHHHNN!
WHAT iiiS TTTHAT... NNNOiSE?
==

THE MOON'S BLUE AREA. SIXTEEN HOURS EARLIER...

I REMEMBER WHEN THE *MOON* USED TO RISE ABOVE THE SECRET CITY OF ATTILAN.

NOW WE LOOK UP AND SEE EARTHRISE.

IT IS A FORLORN SIGHT. SILENTLY, IT SPEAKS TO ME OF EVERYTHING THAT IS DENIED TO US.

WE ARE *NOT* ALIENS. WE ARE *NOT* VISITORS. WE ARE *NOT* EMIGRÉS.

TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND YEARS AGO, WE WERE *HUMANS*, NATIVES OF EARTH.

THEN THE KREE MANIPULATED OUR GENETIC CODES AND, IN AN ATTEMPT TO BREED LIVING WEAPONS, MADE US *INHUMAN*.

AND SO WAS SET OUR DESTINY AS OUTCASTS, AS EXILES, AS FREAKS, SHUNNED AND *FEARED* BY HUMANKIND.

WE HAVE AS MUCH CLAIM UPON THE EARTH AS ANY.
IT IS OUR WORLD, AS SURELY AS HUMANITY LURKS WITHIN OUR INHUMANITY.
AND NOW, THANKS TO ANOTHER MANIPULATIVE ALIEN SPECIES--
--THE KREE'S ANCIENT ENEMIES, THE SKRULLS--
--I AM AFRAID WE ARE GOING TO--
SLAMMM
OH!
MEDUSA! WHAT'S HAPPENING? HAS BLACK BOLT--
MY HUSBAND HAS MADE HIS DECISION.
AND IT IS?
HE HAS NOT TOLD US, SISTER.

MY BROTHER'S *SO* LIKE THAT, ISN'T HE, CRYSTAL? KEEPING THINGS TO HIMSELF.

YES, MAXIMUS.

BUT HE'S *ALLOWED* TO, I SUPPOSE. HE IS THE KING. THE KING IS DEAD. LONG LIVE THE KING.

HOW LONG WAS HE REPLACED BY A *SKRULL?* HOW LONG WAS AN *IMPOSTOR* IN HIS BED?

I DON'T KNOW, MAXIMUS.

IT COULD HAVE BEEN MONTHS. *YEARS.*

ALL THE DAMAGE HE DID.

AND WHAT ABOUT BLACKAGAR *HIMSELF*, A CAPTIVE OF THE CALLOUS SKRULLS?

DID THEY *TORTURE* HIM, DO YOU SUPPOSE? DID THEY *HURT* HIM?

DID THEY MAKE HIM *CRY OUT?*

I DON'T KNOW, SIR.

HNH! I RECOGNIZE THIS HALLWAY. I KNOW WHERE WE'RE GOING.

THE CHAMBER OF DEVICES. IT'S THE *CHAMBER OF DEVICES!*

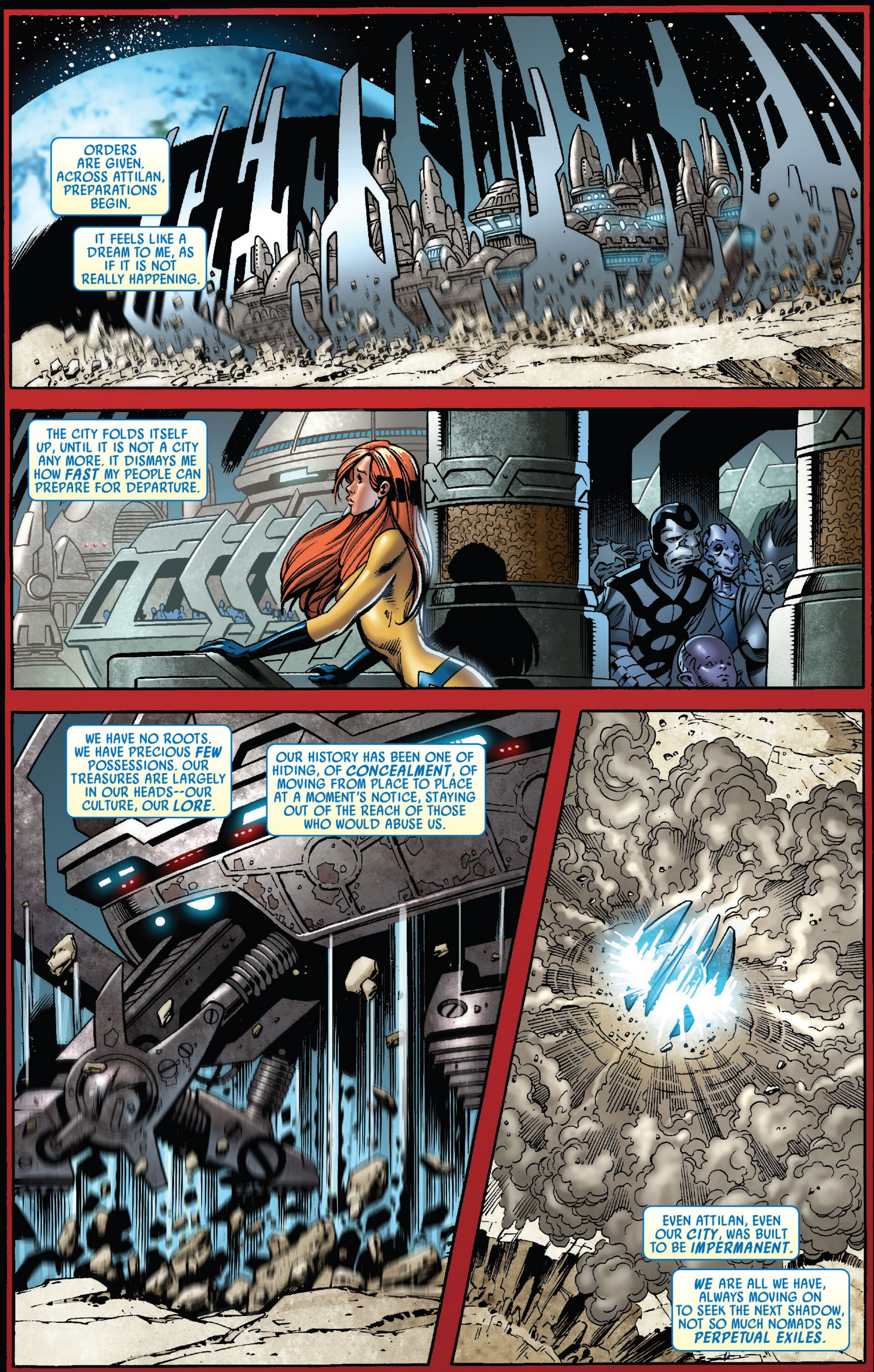
ONLY BLACK BOLT HAS THE KEY.

THE CHAMBER IS LOCKED FOR A *REASON*, HUSBAND.

DO YOU *REALLY* WANT TO DO THIS?

LOOK! OH, LOOK! I'D FORGOTTEN HALF OF THESE THINGS WERE IN HERE!
ALL THIS STUFF, BROTHER! ALL THESE THINGS I INVENTED TO HELP MAKE US STRONG, AND YOU JUST LOCKED THEM ALL UP!
YOU WOULDN'T LET US USE THEM!
I THINK OUR KING INTENDS TO LET US USE THEM NOW.
IS THAT TRUE, BLACK BOLT?
ARE YOU GOING TO ASK US TO USE THEM? ARE YOU SUGGESTING THAT THE INHUMANS CAST ASIDE GENERATIONS OF RESERVED ISOLATION AND...
...WHAT? ADOPT AN ACTIVE STANCE? A PREEMPTIVE ONE?
I PERCEIVE NO WEAKNESS IN THAT PLAN.
AGREED, WISE KARNAK.
DO NOT QUESTION OUR KING, SISTER.
WILL HE ANSWER, MEDUSA?
IN HIS OWN TIME. IN HIS OWN WAY.
WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?
THE INHUMANS HAVE BEEN PASSIVE FOR TOO LONG. WE HAVE LET OURSELVES BECOME VICTIMS.
LOOK! WHAT'S HE FOUND NOW?

THIS?
OF ALL THE THINGS IN HERE, I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU KEPT THIS!
THE TECHNOLOGY SCARED YOU.
FUNNY, BECAUSE I MADE IT FOR YOU. PERHAPS YOU SCARE YOU?
WOULD YOU REALLY USE IT? REALLY?
OH MY... WHAT DID THE SKRULLS DO TO YOU?


ORDERS ARE GIVEN. ACROSS ATTILAN, PREPARATIONS BEGIN.
IT FEELS LIKE A DREAM TO ME, AS IF IT IS NOT REALLY HAPPENING.
THE CITY FOLDS ITSELF UP, UNTIL IT IS NOT A CITY ANY MORE. IT DISMAYS ME HOW FAST MY PEOPLE CAN PREPARE FOR DEPARTURE.
WE HAVE NO ROOTS. WE HAVE PRECIOUS FEW POSSESSIONS. OUR TREASURES ARE LARGELY IN OUR HEADS--OUR CULTURE, OUR LORE.
OUR HISTORY HAS BEEN ONE OF HIDING, OF CONCEALMENT, OF MOVING FROM PLACE TO PLACE AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE, STAYING OUT OF THE REACH OF THOSE WHO WOULD ABUSE US.
EVEN ATTILAN, EVEN OUR CITY, WAS BUILT TO BE IMPERMANENT.
WE ARE ALL WE HAVE, ALWAYS MOVING ON TO SEEK THE NEXT SHADOW, NOT SO MUCH NOMADS AS PERPETUAL EXILES.

I BELIEVE BLACK BOLT IS GOING TO TAKE US OUT OF THE SHADOWS.
AND THE THOUGHT *TERRIFIES* ME.

THE THRONE ROOM.

ORBIT ACHIEVED. DRIVE SYSTEMS READY.

WE AWAIT YOUR PLEASURE, MY LORD MAXIMUS.

YES, YES, MILADY, ALMOST THERE...

...I'M JUST MAKING THE FINAL CALIBRATIONS...

DEAR *LOCKJAW*.

OF ALL THE INHUMANS, YOU AND I HAVE SPENT THE ***MOST*** TIME OUTSIDE OUR ENCLAVE.

I HAVE SOUGHT THE COMPANY OF HUMANS, LEARNED THEIR WAYS, AND SHARED THEIR DREAMS.

I HAVE BEEN AN AVENGER, AND ONE QUARTER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR. I HAVE BATTLED TO PROTECT EARTH FOR HUMAN AND INHUMAN ***ALIKE***.

I ***ALWAYS*** DREAMED THAT, ONE DAY, MY FELLOW INHUMANS COULD DO THE SAME.

THERE WOULD BE AN END TO MISTRUST, AN END TO HIDING. WE WOULD LEARN TO ***SHARE*** THE PLANET WITH OUR HUMAN KIN.

WE WOULD ***INTEGRATE***, AND THERE WOULD NO LONGER ***BE*** HUMANS OR INHUMANS, JUST THE ***PEOPLE OF EARTH***.

THANKS TO THE HUMAN ATTACKS--AND THE INFAMY OF THE SKRULLS, ONE ***LAST*** ABUSER TOO MANY--WE ARE TURNING OUR ***BACKS*** ON THAT DESTINY.

WE ARE TURNING OUR BACKS AND CLENCHING OUR ***FISTS***.

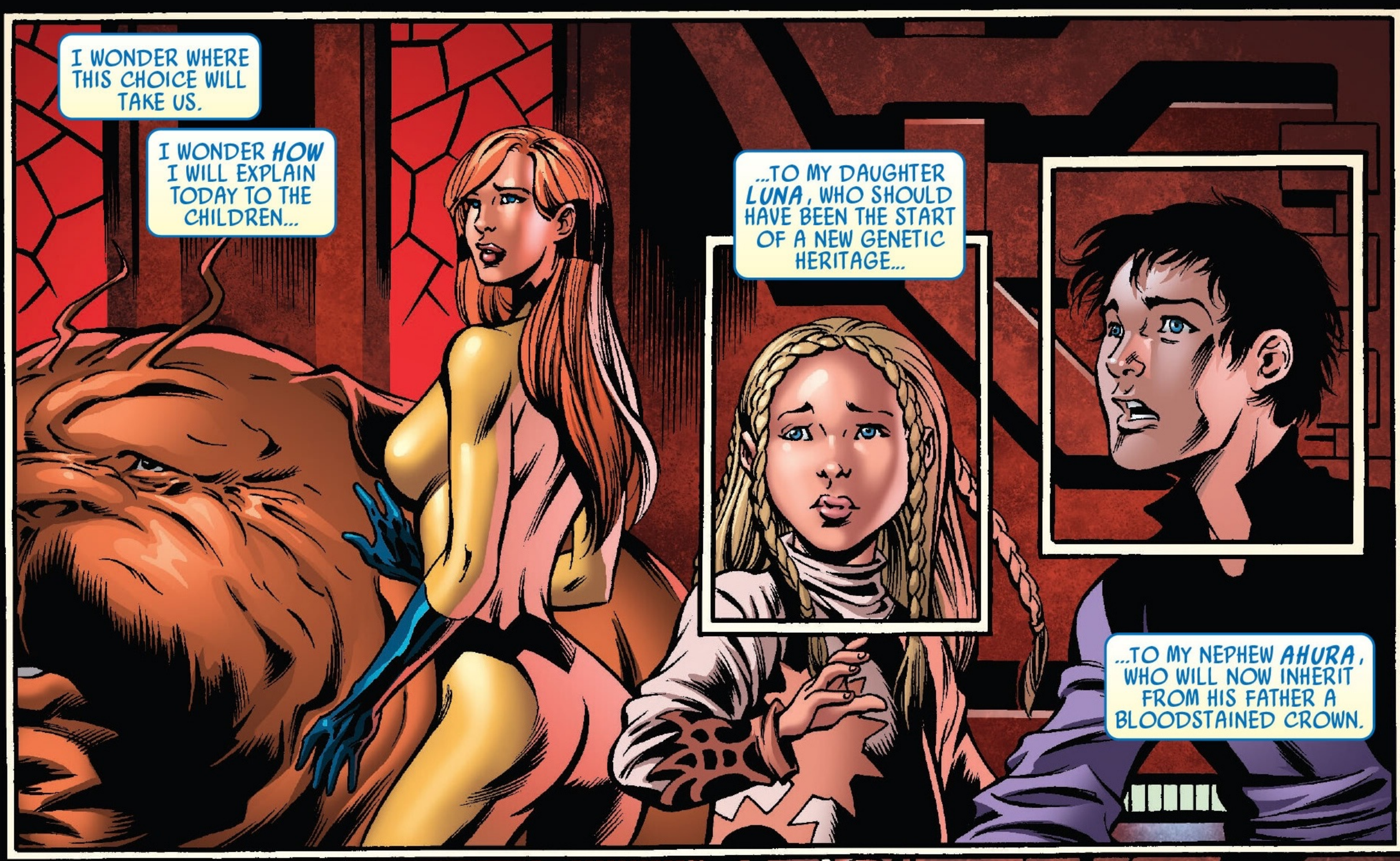
MY QUEEN, WE ARE *FINALLY* READY! THE *ECHOPACITOR* IS PRIMED AND READY TO ABSORB ENERGY. SAFETY DAMPENERS ARE IN PLACE.
THANK YOU, SWEET LADY.
THE POWER CONDUITS TO THE DRIVE SYSTEMS ARE OPEN.

SO BROTHER, THE TIME HAS COME.
YOU-- WHOSE MERE UTTERANCE CAN SHATTER A MOUNTAIN--JUST HAVE TO GIVE THE ORDER. *LITERALLY*.
WHAT DO YOU SAY? LET ME HEAR YOU. FOR THIS IS THE *BEGINNING*, AND IN THE BEGINNING, THERE IS *ALWAYS* A WORD...
NOW

NOW
NOW
NOW

VREEEEEEEEEE
ZZZZSHOOOOM

THE ARKANO NEBULA. NOW...
THE SKRULLS ARE SHOWN NO MERCY.
IN ONE VENGEFUL OUTBURST OF LIGHT AND SOUND, WE INHUMANS BECOME EXACTLY WHAT EVERYONE ALWAYS FEARED WE WERE.
EXACTLY WHAT THE KREE MADE US TO BE.
WARRIORS. WEAPONS. SURGICALLY PRECISE. CLINICALLY RUTHLESS. UTTERLY DEVASTATING.
THE FAMOUSLY STOIC INHUMAN RESERVE HAS GONE.
WE HAVE BEEN PUSHED TOO FAR.


I WONDER WHERE THIS CHOICE WILL TAKE US.
I WONDER HOW I WILL EXPLAIN TODAY TO THE CHILDREN...
...TO MY DAUGHTER LUNA, WHO SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE START OF A NEW GENETIC HERITAGE...
...TO MY NEPHEW AHURA, WHO WILL NOW INHERIT FROM HIS FATHER A BLOODSTAINED CROWN.

"TODAY, CHILDREN, WAS THE DAY WHEN WE DECIDED WE HAD ENDURED ENOUGH, AND WE TOOK CONTROL OF OUR OWN DESTINY.
"AND THE BRIGHTEST, AND MOST DEADLY WEAPONS IN THE GALAXY WERE FINALLY DRAWN."

THE LAST SKRULL CRUISER IS ATTEMPTING TO BREAK CLEAR.
TURN TO PURSUE, KARNAK.
OH, GREAT RANDAC! LET THEM GO!
THE CRUISER IS RUNNING COREWARD. IT HAS CROSSED THE FRONTIER.

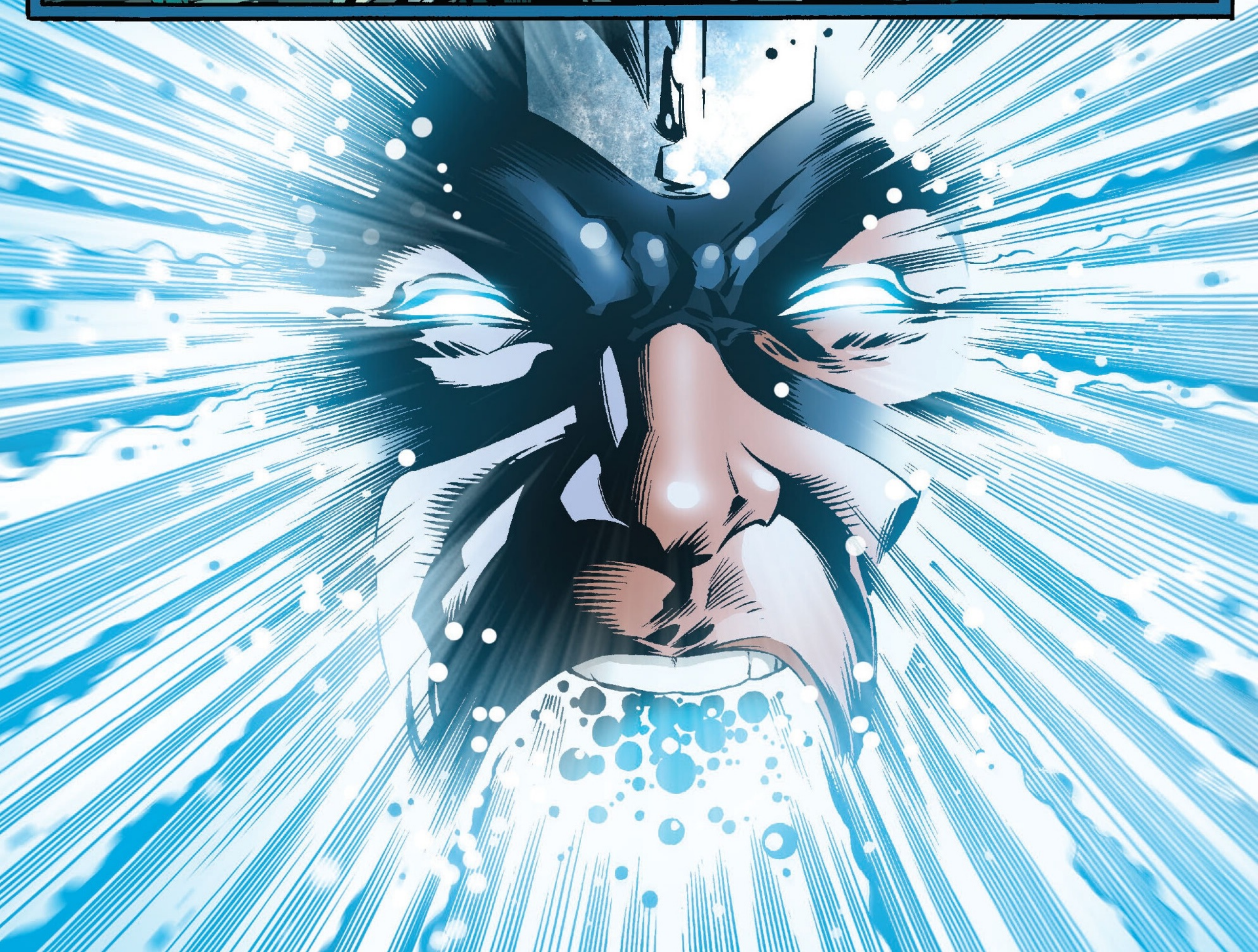
APPROACHING VESSEL....ATTEND! ATTEND!

YOU ARE MAKING A HOSTILE INCURSION INTO SHI'AR IMPERIAL SPACE.

DESIST COURSE. DESIST, OR WE WILL FIRE UPON YOU!

THREE H'JAHT CLASS SHI'AR WARBIRDS, MY LORD.
THEY ARE APPROACHING AT POINT NINE SUPERLUMINAL AND HAVE TARGET LOCK WITH THEIR MAIN BATTERIES.
APPROACHING VESSEL...

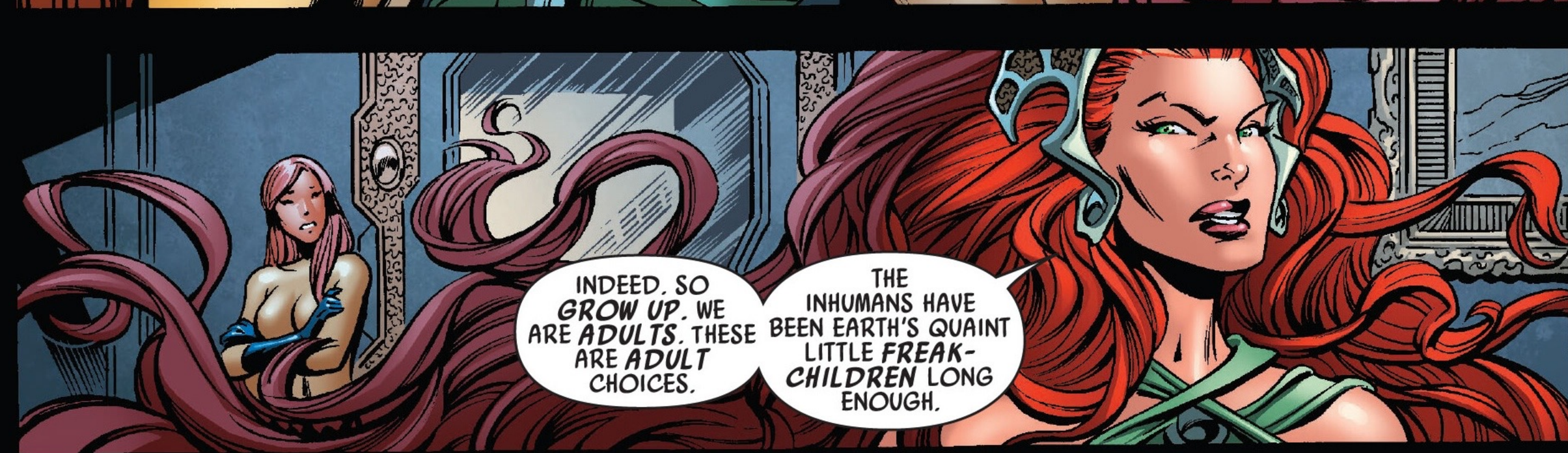
...THIS IS YOUR FINAL NOTICE.
WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSE?



TWO HOURS LATER...
ARE WE DONE?
SISTER, WE HAVE BARELY BEGUN.

I SEE. AND YOU'RE COMFORTABLE WITH THIS, ARE YOU?
YOU'RE COMFORTABLE WITH US BECOMING SOLDIERS?
IT'S HOW WE WERE MADE.
AND IT'S A COMPULSION WE HAVE RESISTED UNTIL NOW.

WOULD YOU HAVE US RETURN TO THE TERRAN MOON, WASH THE BLOOD FROM OUR HANDS, AND PRETEND EVERYTHING IS THE WAY IT WAS?
I'M NOT AN IDIOT, MEDUSA.
WE HAVE CROSSED A LINE THAT WE CANNOT UN-CROSS.
MURDER IS MUCH LIKE VIRGINITY. ONCE THE ACT IS DONE, IT IS ALWAYS DONE.


INDEED. SO GROW UP. WE ARE ADULTS. THESE ARE ADULT CHOICES.
THE INHUMANS HAVE BEEN EARTH'S QUAINT LITTLE FREAK-CHILDREN LONG ENOUGH.

OUR COURSE IS SET FOR KREE SPACE.
FOR WHAT PURPOSE? NOW WE'VE SLAKED OUR THIRST FOR VENGEANCE ON THE SKRULLS, ARE THE KREE TO BE OUR NEXT VICTIMS?
IT'S NO LESS THAN THEY DESERVE.

HALA, THRONEWORLD OF THE KREE EMPIRE.
MY LORD RONAN.
THIS HAS BEEN AUTHENTICATED?
YES, ACCUSER.
THE SO-CALLED INHUMANS HAVE REACHED THE BORDERS OF THE EMPIRE.
I DO NOT MEAN THE ROYAL FAMILY, LORD. I MEAN THE ENTIRE INHUMAN RACE.
AND THEY HAVE MADE ZERO ATTEMPT TO HIDE THEMSELVES.
THIS DAY WAS INEVITABLE, YOU KNOW.
THE MOMENT OUR ANCESTORS MEDDLED WITH TERRAN GENETICS TO MOLD LIVING WEAPONS, THIS DAY WAS PREORDAINED.
A WEAPON ALWAYS RETURNS TO DAMN ITS CREATOR. THE FINER THE WEAPON, THE GREATER THE DAMNATION.
OUR FLEET IS READY. THE GREAT SHIELD IS RAISED.
AND IT MUST SAVE US. WE ARE STILL TOO WEAK FROM THE PHALANX INFESTATION TO COMMIT TO OPEN WAR, BUT THE LEGACY OF THE PHALANX TECHNOLOGY WILL PROTECT US.
KREE SPACE WILL REMAIN SEALED AND BARRED TO THE INHUMAN MENACE AND THE GALAXY AS A WHOLE.

CONTACT KING BLASTAAR.
REMIND HIM OF HIS OBLIGATIONS TO ME. TELL HIM I NEED HIS NEGATIVE ZONE ARMIES.
I WILL, ACCUSER.
HOWEVER, "KING" BLASTAAR HAS NOT RESPONDED TO ANY OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUÉS FOR ALMOST A WEEK.
D'AST HIS GREEDY HANDS.
THEN WE WILL FIGHT ALONE.
THE ATTILAN THRONE ROOM.
THE KREE EMPIRE'S PROTECTIVE SHIELD IS PERMANENTLY LIT.
IT IS A FORMIDABLE SCREEN. IT WILL KEEP THEM SAFE FROM ALMOST EVERYTHING.
HEH! "ALMOST". I LIKE THAT.
I SAW THE SHIELD CLOSE UP WHEN WE LAST VISITED HALA, GORGON, DURING OUR SEARCH FOR LORD BLACK BOLT.
AS WITH ALL THINGS, I CAN PERCEIVE ITS FLAWS.
CERTAIN SUB-HARMONIC WEAKNESSES IN ITS WAVELENGTH.
EXPLOITABLE?
THEY CAN BE MANIPULATED BY OUR TELEPORT CADRE.
MY HUSBAND THANKS YOU, KARNAK.

I SIT AND LISTEN AS THE ROYAL FAMILY ORGANIZES THE INVASION OF A STELLAR EMPIRE AS IF IT WAS ONE OF ATTILAN'S GREAT FESTIVALS.

THE FEAST OF RANDAC, THE FESTIVAL OF MISTS. IS THERE ENOUGH SEATING IN THE GREAT CHAMBER? HAVE THE FLOWER-WEAVERS BEEN BRIEFED?

WHAT ARE THE TARGET SITES FOR THE INFANTRY ELITE? WHAT AMPLITUDE OF SONICS WILL BE NEEDED TO CRIPPLE THEIR WARSHIPS?

THE ONE ***POSITIVE*** THOUGHT THAT I CLING TO...

...IS THAT MY ARRANGED MARRIAGE TO THE KREE ACCUSER ***RONAN*** WILL NO LONGER BE NECESSARY.

I CONSIDER VOLUNTEERING FOR THE ASSAULT FORCE THAT WILL STORM THE KREE PALACE SO I CAN ***KILL*** RONAN MYSELF.

JUST TO BE SURE.

THIS IS NOT FUNNY.

FIFTY HOURS LATER...

TELEPORT CADRE...

...MY HUSBAND HAS GIVEN THE WORD.

FZZZZZMMM

STRIKE TEAM--DEPLOY! SECURE THE AREA!

GH-KOOM

SIGNAL HALA! THEY'RE *INSIDE* THE SHIELD!

SET!

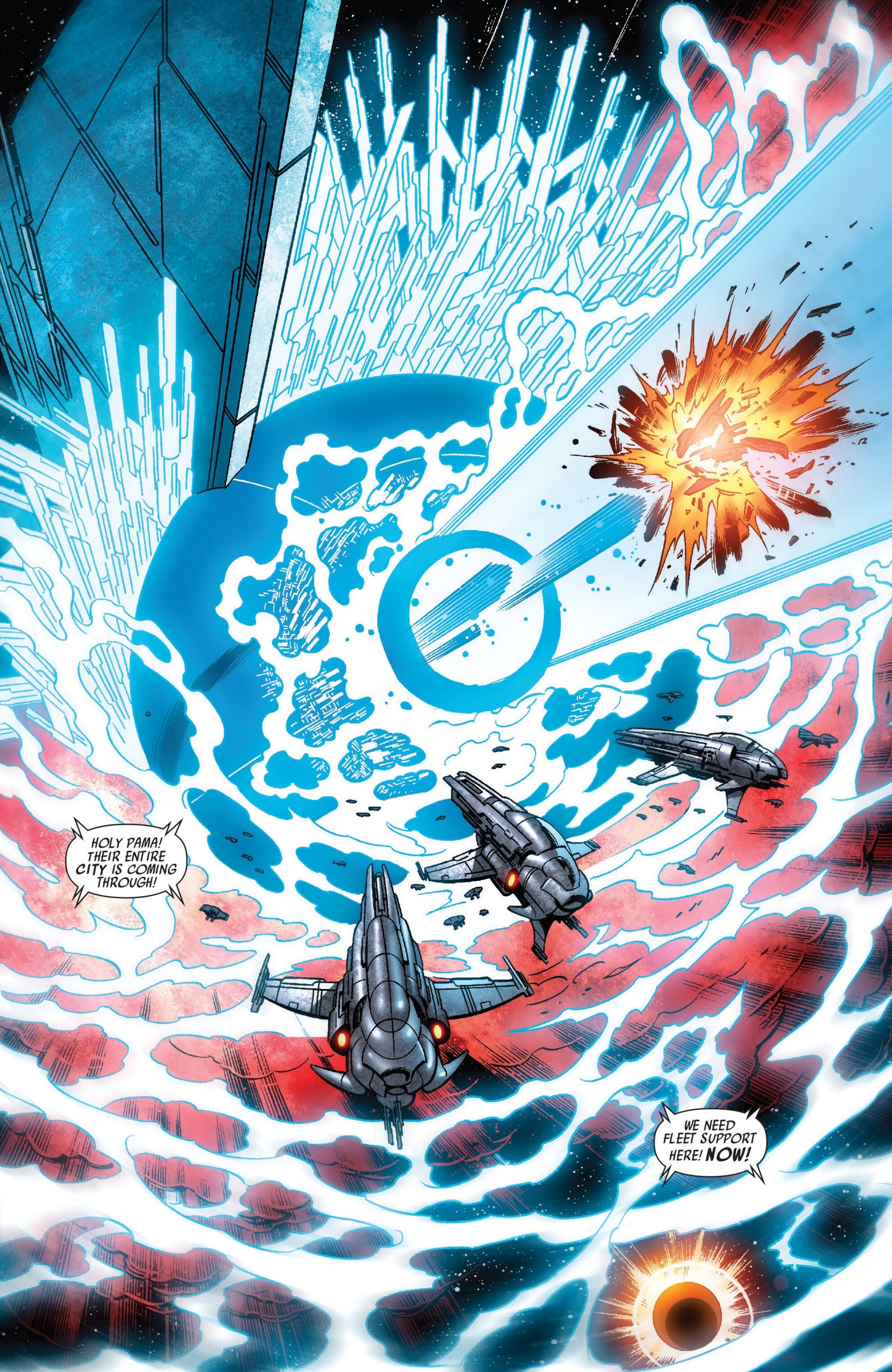
TEAM ONE. SONIC CHARGES SET!

TELEPORT CLEAR, GORGON.

VICINITY OF HALA, KREE HEARTLAND.

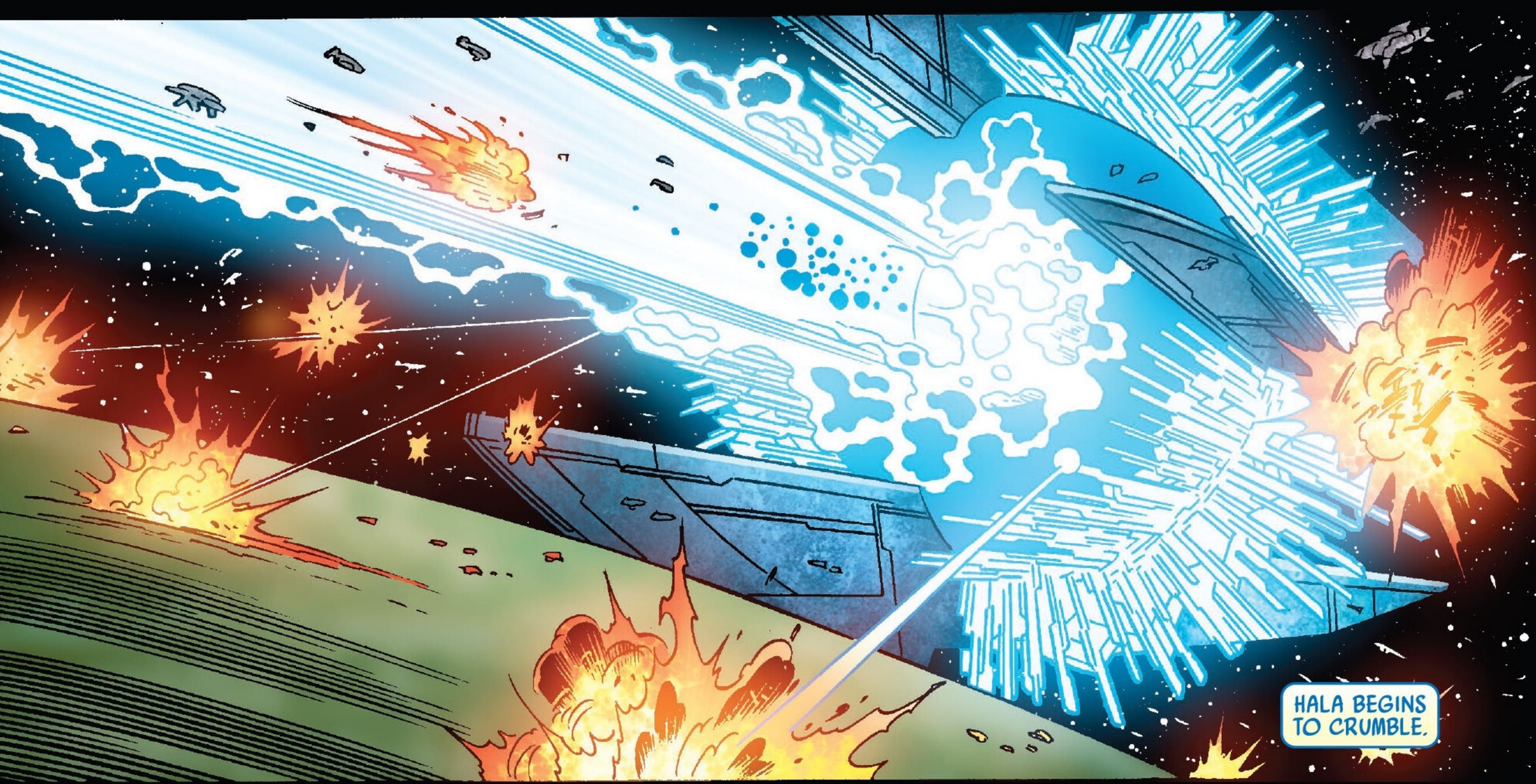
BATTLESHIP TAN-VOR TO WARNET CENTRAL!

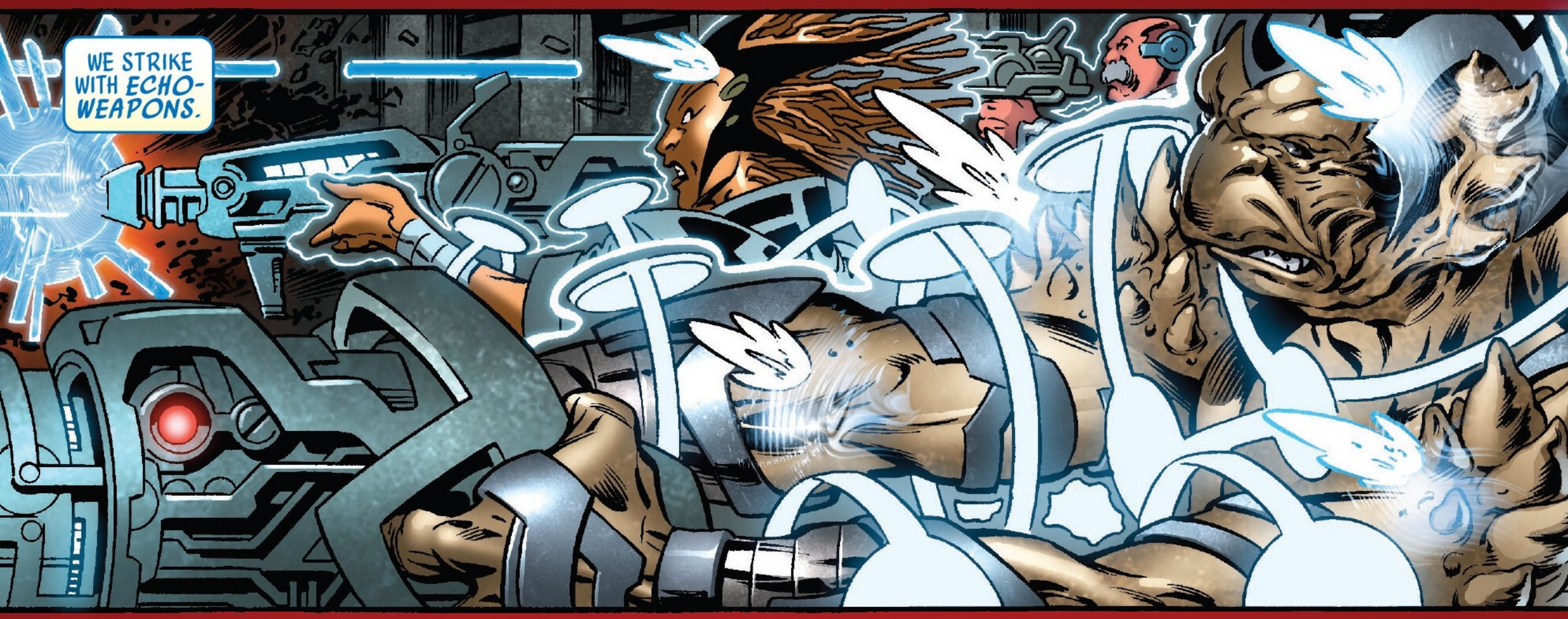
THE GREAT SHIELD IS BLOWN! REPEAT, THE GREAT SHIELD IS BLOWN!


HOLY PAMA! THEIR ENTIRE CITY IS COMING THROUGH!
WE NEED FLEET SUPPORT HERE! NOW!

I SAY AGAIN! THEIR ENTIRE CITY IS IN FLIGHT!
SHOW ME.

VIEWER SIX, ACCUSER.
OH GODS.
THEY'RE MAGNIFICENT.


HALA BEGINS TO CRUMBLE.


WE STRIKE WITH ECHO-WEAPONS.

WE SHRUG OFF THE KREE GUNFIRE WITH ECHO-SKELETON ARMOR.
BOTH TECHNOLOGIES DRAW THEIR POWER FROM VIBRANIUM CAPACITORS THAT STORE THE WHISPERS OF OUR KING.
THEY ARE MORE OF MAXIMUS'S FORGOTTEN TOYS FROM THE CHAMBER OF DEVICES.

BUT EVEN WITHOUT THE ADVANTAGE OF THIS SONIC TECHNOLOGY...

...WE WOULD BE INVINCIBLE.

THOOOOM
I TAKE IT YOU'VE NOT COME TO CELEBRATE A WEDDING.
PERHAPS WE HAVE.
NHHH!
DON'T MOCK ME, WOMAN. JUST GET IT OVER WITH.
YOU'VE COME TO DESTROY THE ANCIENT KREE. IT WAS ALWAYS GOING TO BE THIS WAY.

MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO, YOUR RACE MANIPULATED OUR BLOODLINE TO CREATE PERFECT, LIVING WEAPONS.
YOUR ANCESTORS INTENDED THE INHUMANS TO BE AN ELITE MILITARY FORCE THAT WOULD ALLOW THE KREE TO BECOME THE DOMINANT SPECIES IN THE GALAXY.
GREATER THAN THE SPARTOI. GREATER THAN THE SHI'AR.
FAR, FAR GREATER THAN THE SKRULLS.
A MUTUAL DESTINY. YOU KREE HAVE TURNED YOUR BACKS ON IT. WE HAVE NOT.
WE HAVE COME TO ACCOMPLISH IT. WE HAVE COME TO TAKE THE KREE RACE TO THE NEXT STAGE OF ITS EVOLUTION.
WHETHER IT WANTS IT OR NOT.

TWO WORDS IS ALL IT WILL TAKE.
YOU SPEAK FOR YOUR KING, LADY?
ALWAYS.

I NEVER SOUGHT TO LEAD THE KREE.
NEVER. I TOOK THE BURDEN BECAUSE NO ONE ELSE WOULD.
JUST A CARETAKER, KEEPING THE GEARS OILED, WAITING FOR THE REAL THING.

TWO WORDS, RONAN.

MY LORD.

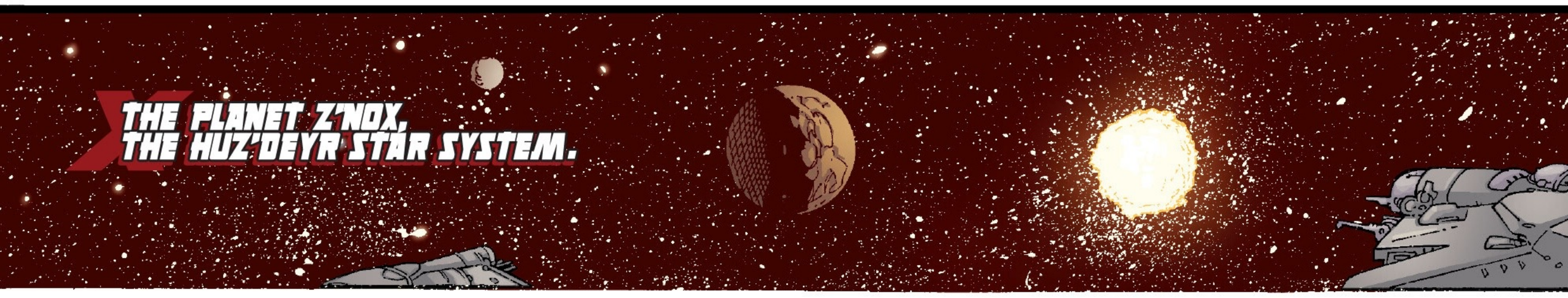
EPILOGUE
CHANDILAR, CAPITAL WORLD OF THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM.
THIS VICTORY WILL BE MINE.
AGHH!
SHTOOM
VULCAN! VULCAN! VULCAN!

VULCAN! VULCAN! VULCAN!
DO YOU HEAR THAT, ADMIRAL KA'ARDUM? DO YOU THINK THEY REALLY LOVE ME?
IT WAS A SUPERB DISPLAY OF SKILL, MY EMPEROR.
IT WAS WORTHLESS, ADMIRAL KA'ARDUM. I DO IT TO PLEASE THE POPULACE.
BUT EVEN THEIR CHEERS RING HOLLOW THESE DAYS. NOTHING STIRS ME FROM MY DARK MOOD.
WHAT DO YOU WANT?
THREE SHIPS?
THREE WARBIRDS.
ALL GONE?
OBLITERATED.

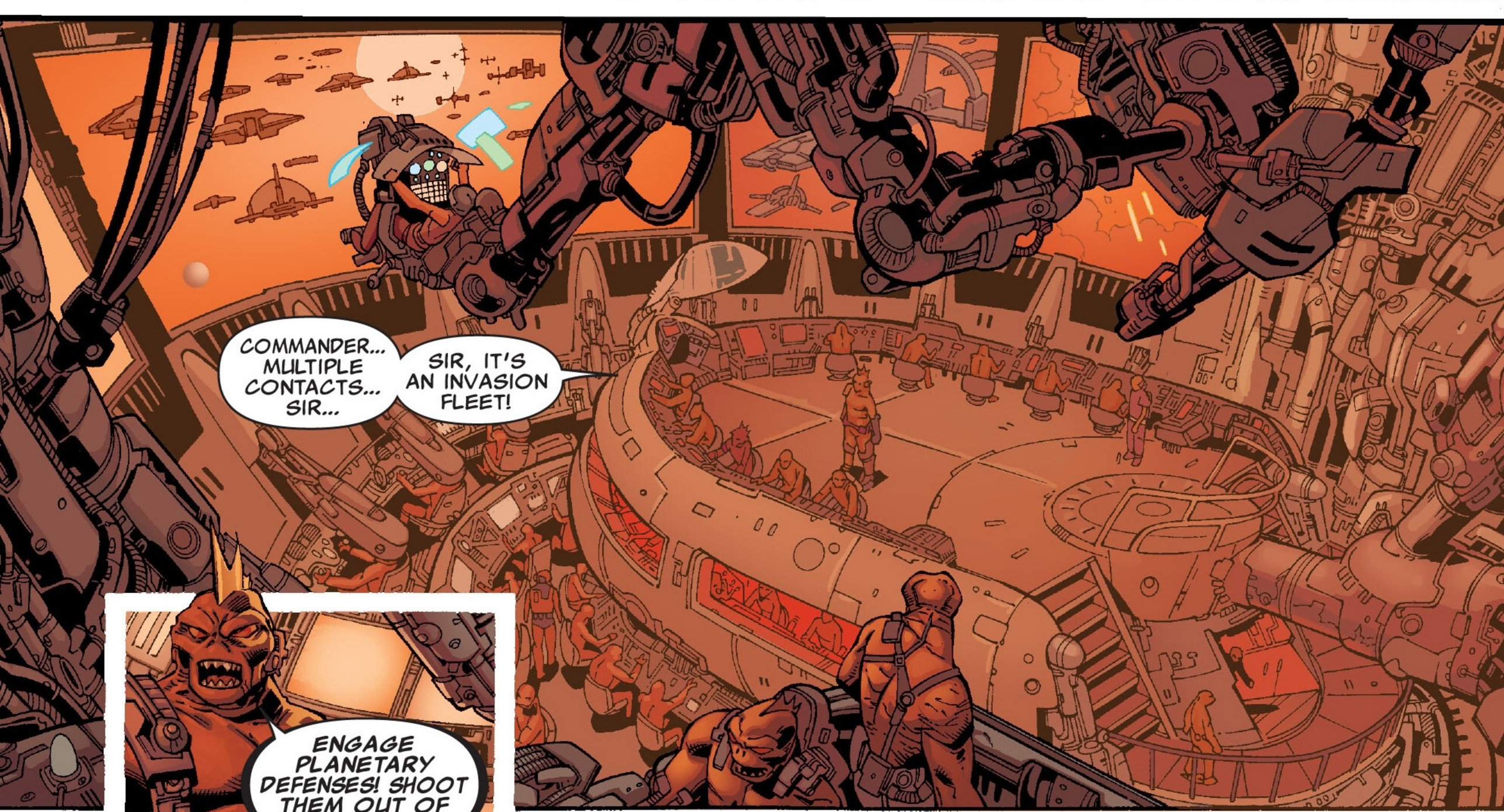
ALONG WITH MANY, MANY SKRULLS. THE LAST REMNANTS OF THEIR KIND.
WELL, THAT'S ONE MORE THREAT TO OUR EXPANSION REMOVED.
SO NOW...THE KREE AND THEIR INHUMAN PETS. OR IS IT THE OTHER WAY AROUND? INTERESTING.
THIS TERRITORIAL INFRINGEMENT CANNOT BE OVERLOOKED. YOU KNOW WHAT THIS IS, DON'T YOU?
PLEASE, ENLIGHTEN ME, MY EMPEROR.
IT'S AN INVITATION.

War of Kings #4 variant by JAE LEE & JUNE CHUNG

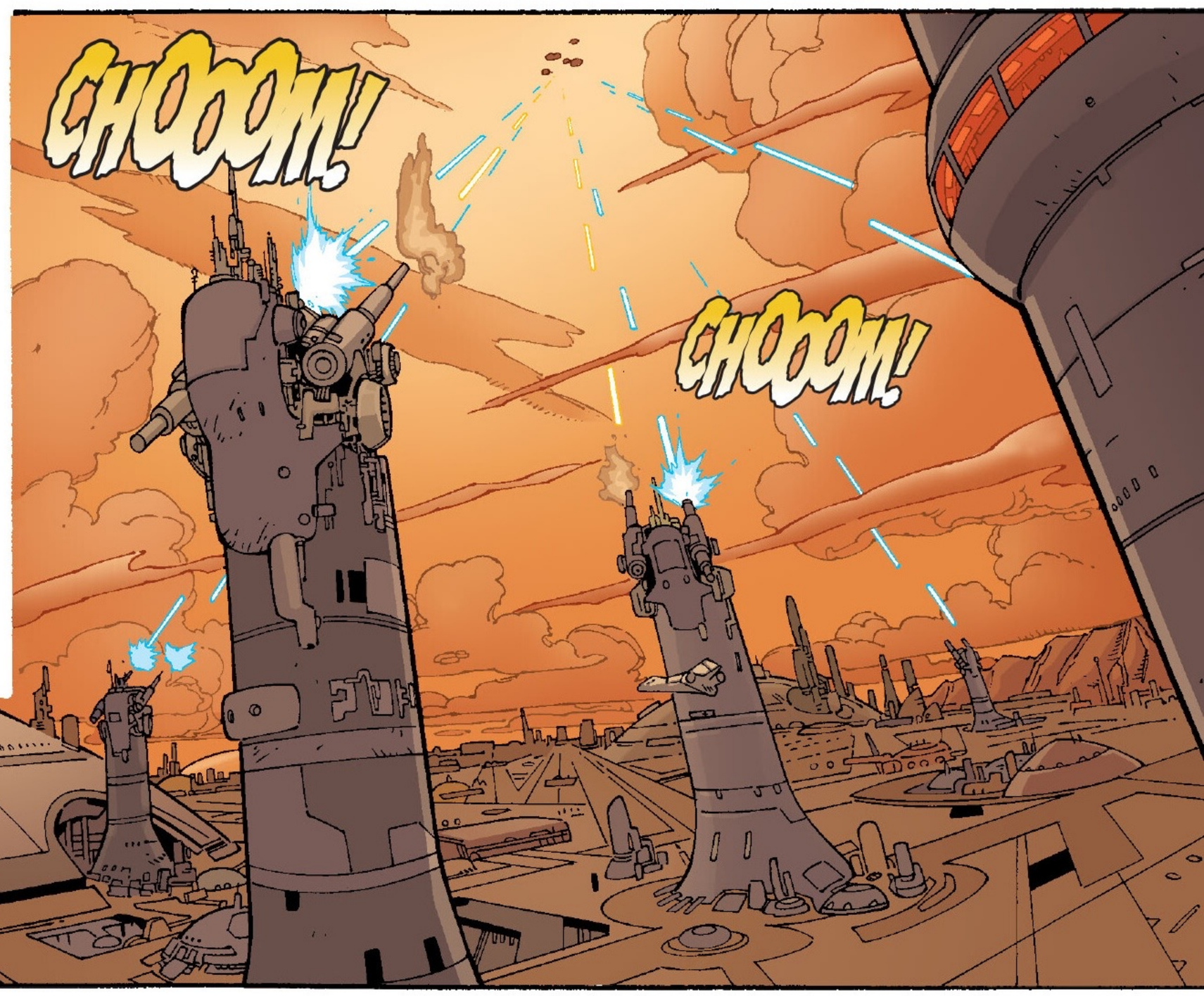
X-MEN: KINGBREAKER 1


THE PLANET Z'NOX,
THE HUZ'DEYR STAR SYSTEM.

THE FIRST
PRAETORIAN FLEET,
SHI'AR ARMADA.
FLEET MANDATE:
EXPANSION OF THE EMPIRE.


COMMANDER... MULTIPLE CONTACTS... SIR...
SIR, IT'S AN INVASION FLEET!

ENGAGE PLANETARY DEFENSES! SHOOT THEM OUT OF THE SKY!
AND SOMEONE INFORM THE KING!!


CHOOOM!
CHOOOM!

WHO WOULD DARE!?
MY LIEGE...IT IS THE SHI'AR! THE SHI'AR ARE INVAD--
KA-THOOM!
WE... ÷COUGH÷ WE ARE THE Z'NOX. WE WILL NEVER FALL...
CALL HOME OUR FORCES... ÷COUGH÷ WE WILL DESTROY THE AVIANS...
"NO ONE CAN WITHSTAND THE Z'NOX!"
BOOOM!

KINGBREAKER
I have a message for you, "king of the z'nox"…
THNK!
hnn!
…from your new ruler.
CHOK!
welcome to the shi'ar empire.
GABRIEL SUMMERS, ALSO KNOWN AS EMPEROR VULCAN.

PLANET OVAR, THE JANSTAK STAR SYSTEM.
THERE MUST BE ORDER.
THE AUTHORITY OF THE GALACTIC COUNCIL COULD HAVE HELPED PREVENT THE RECENT CATASTROPHES.
THE KREE DID NOT SUFFER ALONE DURING THE ANNIHILATION WAVE, AMBASSADOR. RECORDER, IF YOU WILL...
AT LAST KNOWN CENSUS, 3.279 TRILLION LIVES WERE LOST DUE TO--
ENOUGH! RONAN HAS TAKEN STEPS TO INSURE THE KREE'S PROTECTION AND SURVIVAL. CAN RIGEL SAY THE SAME? CAN ANY OTHER EMPIRE SAY THAT?
RIGEL AGREES WITH YOU, KREE. THE GALACTIC COUNCIL MUST BE RE-FORMED. THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE SHI'AR IS MOST TROUBLESOME, THOUGH.
THEIR LACK OF AID DURING THE ANNIHILATION WAVE AND THE RECENT CONQUEST OF KREE SPACE IS EVEN MORE SO.
INDEED... AND PERHAPS MORE THAN TROUBLING.
OVOID SCANNERS HAVE INTERCEPTED A DISTRESS CALL FROM THE Z'NOX. THEY HAVE BEEN INVADED BY THE SHI'AR FORCES.
THEY ARE OUTSIDE THE SHI'AR GALAXY. LILANDRA NEREMANI RENOUNCED EXPANSION AFTER THE KREE/SHI'AR WAR.
IF THERE IS TO BE ORDER, THE SHI'AR MUST BE INVOLVED. THEY ARE TOO POWERFUL TO IGNORE.
WE WILL GET AN ANSWER TO THIS INCURSION FROM THE IMPERIUM... WHOEVER MAY BE RUNNING IT.

VULCAN!
VULCAN!
VULCAN!
VULCAN!
VULCAN!
VULCAN!

SHI'AR PEOPLE! HEAR ME!!

EMPEROR VULCAN HAS MADE TRUE HIS PROMISE...THE SHI'AR RISE AGAIN! OUR POWER GROWS, AND OUR EMPIRE EXPANDS!
THE UNIVERSE ONCE MORE BOWS TO OUR POWER! IT HAS ALREADY BEGUN!
EMPRESS CAL'SYEE NERAMANI, ALSO KNOWN AS DEATHBIRD.

FOR ON THIS DAY...YOUR EMPEROR HAS BROKEN THE KING OF THE MIGHTY Z'NOX!
ADMIRAL KA'ARDUM, LEADER OF THE SHI'AR FLEET.

RAAAAAAAAA!!!
THIS IS YOUR EMPEROR VULCAN! VULCAN THE GREAT! VULCAN THE KINGBREAKER!
"HE SHOULD BE HERE."

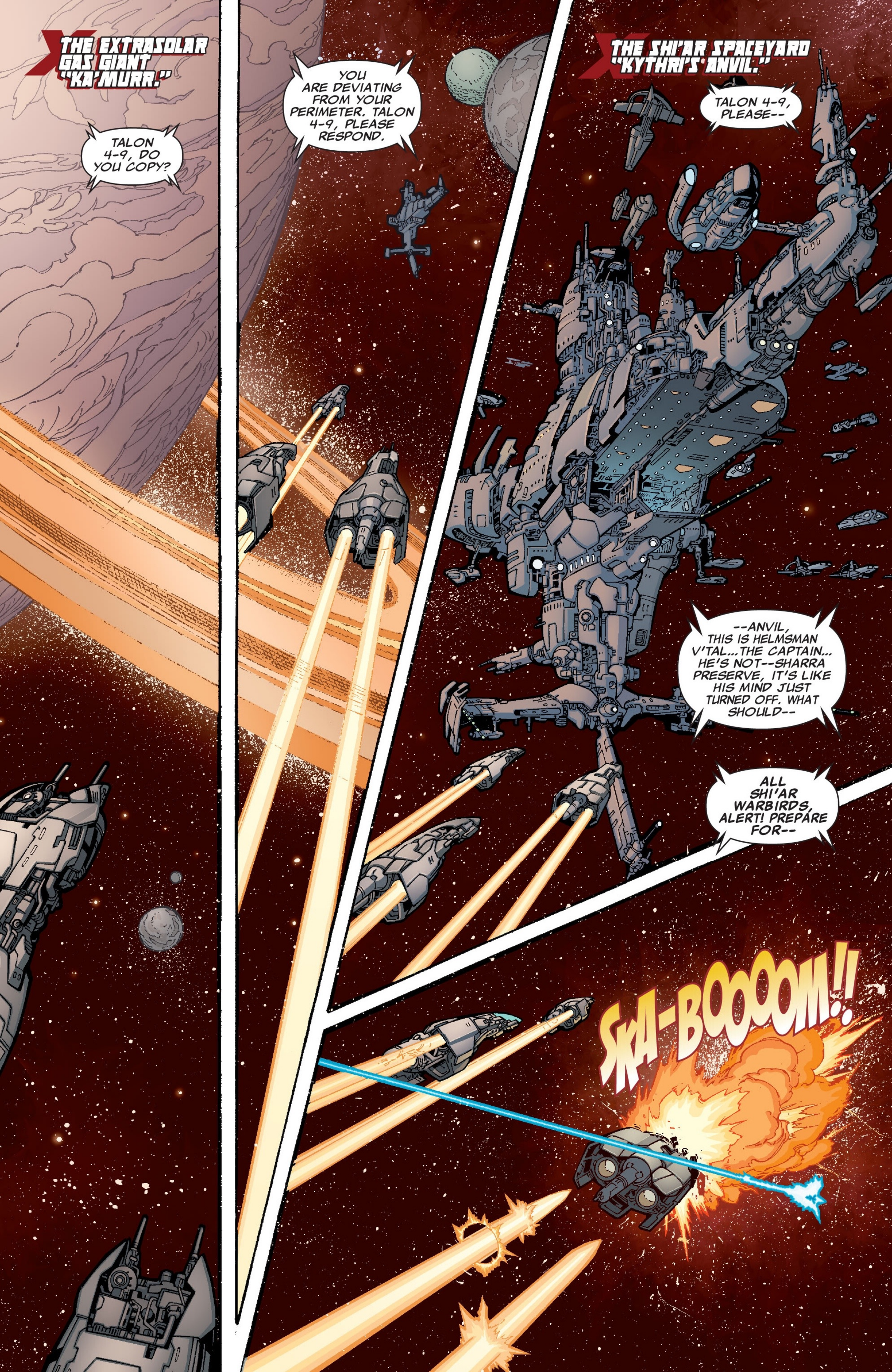
HE SHOULD STAY ON THE FRONT LINE, OR BE HERE ON CHANDILAR OVERSEEING THE EMPIRE. NOT TORMENTING HIS BROTHER.

AND WILL YOU TELL HIM WHAT HE SHOULD BE DOING, UNCLE?

I KNOW YOU ARE NOT AFRAID OF HIM, CAL'SYEE. YOU FEAR NOTHING, YOU NEVER DID.

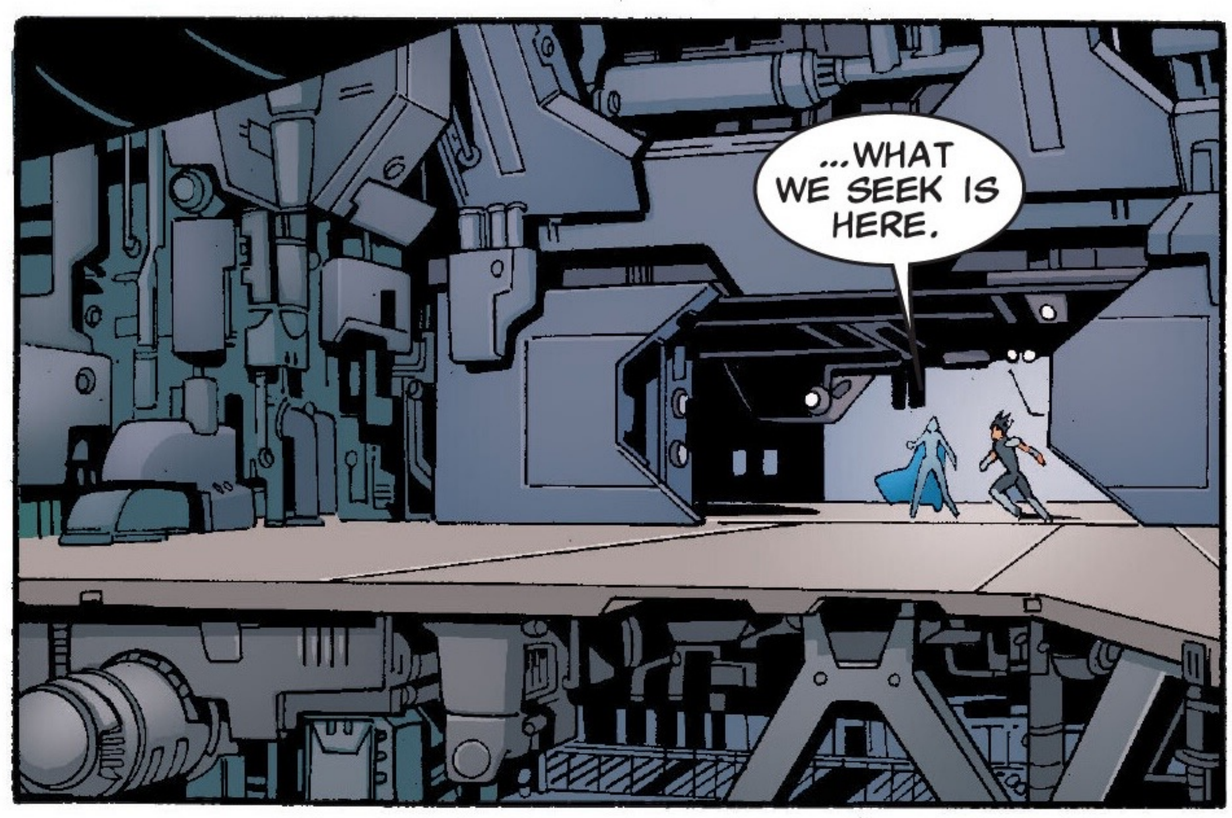
VULCAN IS EMPEROR. HE DOES WHAT HE WANTS. BUT I KNOW HIS HEART, AND I KNOW THE HATE THAT BLOOD CAN MAKE.

LET HIM HAVE HIS HATE. IT MAKES THE EMPIRE STRONG.

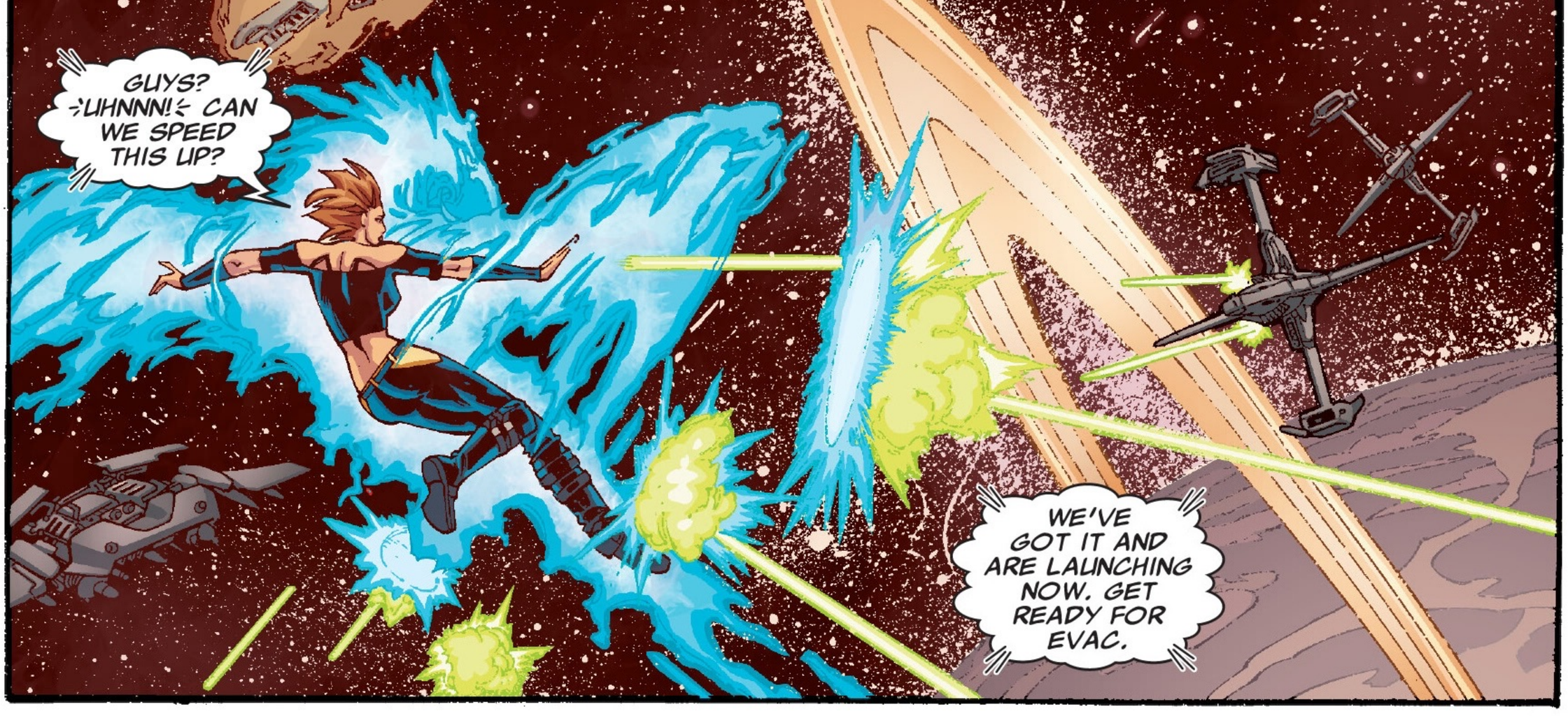

THE EXTRASOLAR GAS GIANT "KA'MURR."
TALON 4-9, DO YOU COPY?
YOU ARE DEVIATING FROM YOUR PERIMETER. TALON 4-9, PLEASE RESPOND.
THE SHI'AR SPACEYARD "KYTHRI'S ANVIL."
TALON 4-9, PLEASE--
--ANVIL, THIS IS HELMSMAN V'TAL...THE CAPTAIN... HE'S NOT--SHARRA PRESERVE, IT'S LIKE HIS MIND JUST TURNED OFF. WHAT SHOULD--
ALL SHI'AR WARBIRDS, ALERT! PREPARE FOR--
SKA-BOOOOM!!

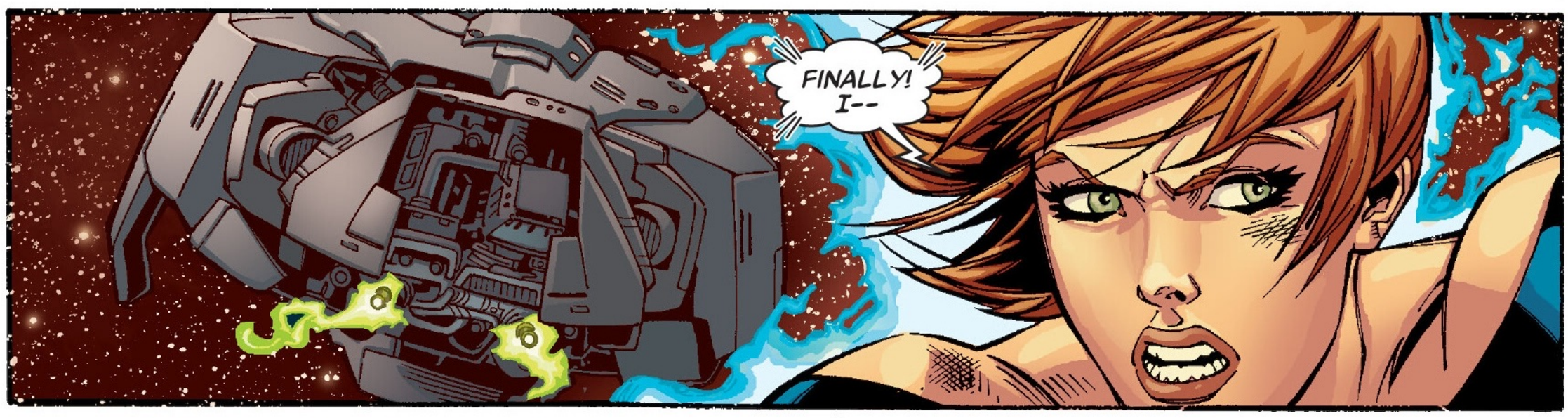
KA-THOM
RACHEL GREY, ALSO KNOWN AS MARVEL GIRL.
I CAN HEAR THEM, LILANDRA...THEY'VE ALREADY SENT OUT THE ALARM. WE'VE GOT ABOUT FIVE MINUTES BEFORE THE REST OF THE FLEET ARRIVES.
IF ANY OF THE GUARD SHOW UP--
I KNOW THE DRILL, JUST GO!

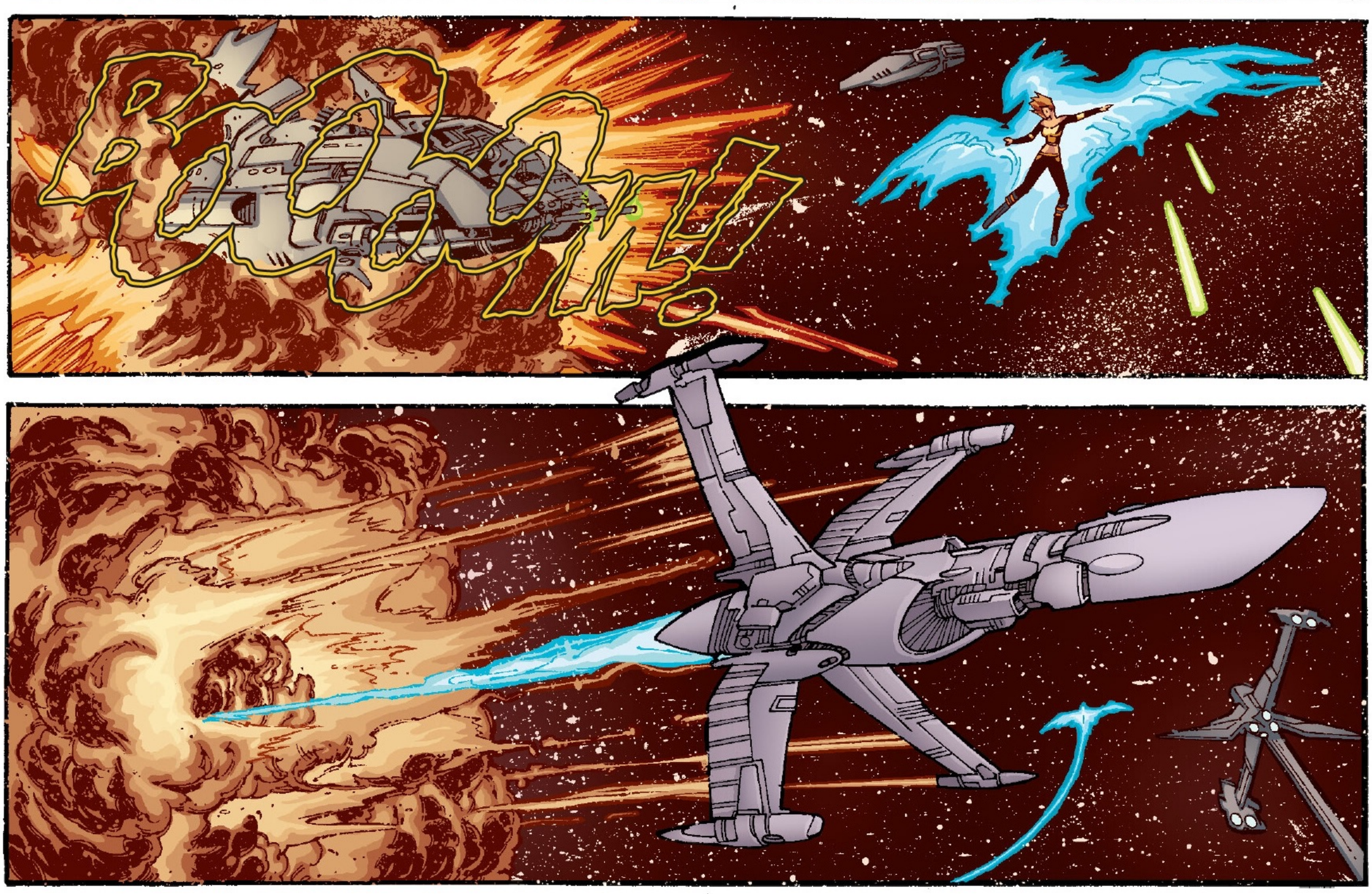
PLEASE, I BEG YOU...YOU ARE MY PEOPLE. LAY DOWN YOUR ARMS. I DO NOT WISH TO SEE YOU HURT.
LILANDRA NERAMANI, FORMER EMPRESS OF THE SHI'AR.
LILANDRA NERAMANI, YOUR TERMINATION HAS BEEN ORDERED BY THE EMPEROR HIMSELF.
KILL HER.
I AM SO SORRY I FAILED YOU.
KORVUS... TAKE THEM.
RRAAAAA!!
GAAAH!!
AAAIEEE!!
KORVUS ROOK'SHIR, WIELDER OF THE BLADE OF THE PHOENIX.



THE STARJAMMER. PIRATE VESSEL.

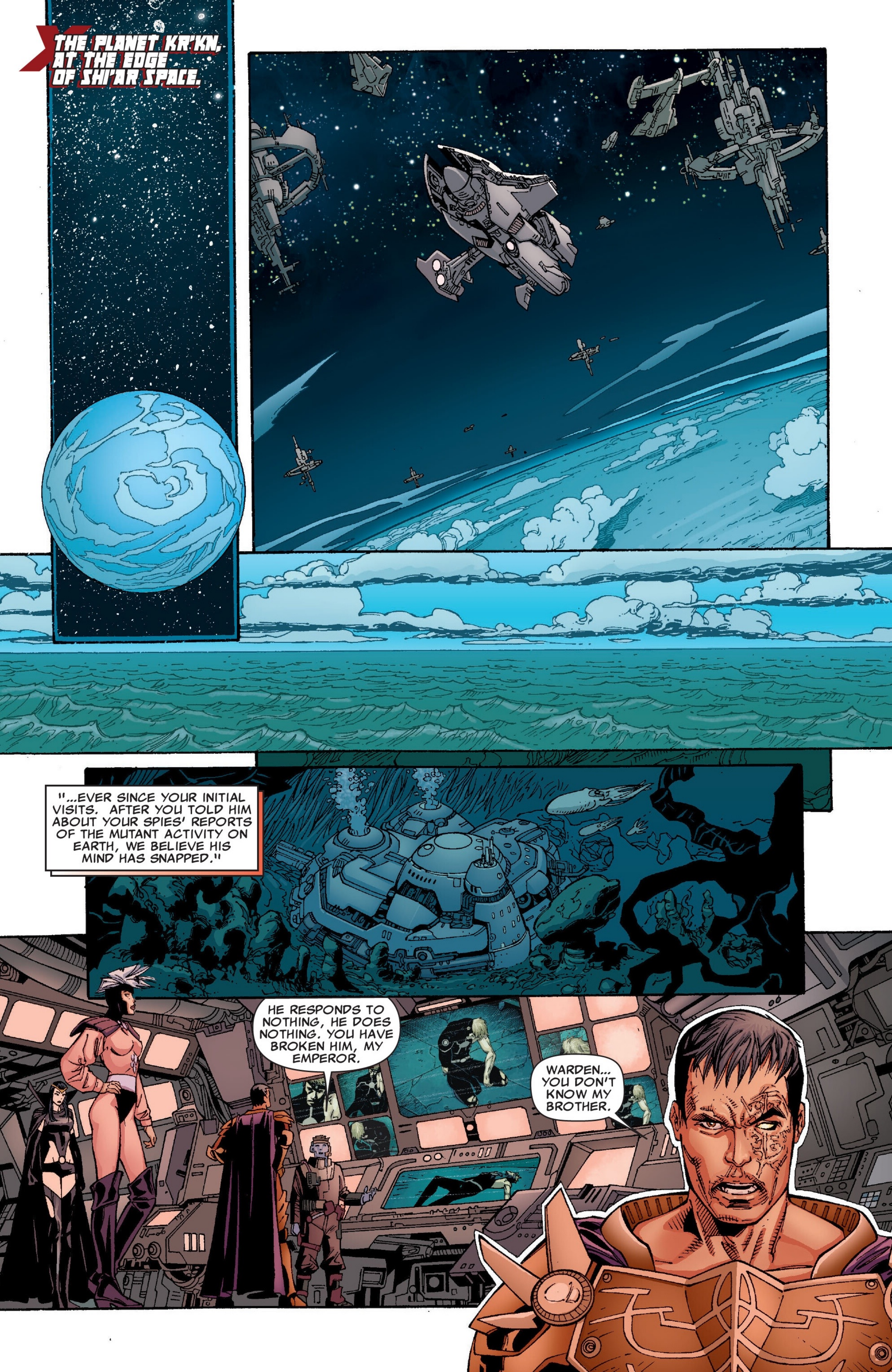

GUYS? -UHNNN!- CAN WE SPEED THIS UP?
WE'VE GOT IT AND ARE LAUNCHING NOW. GET READY FOR EVAC.


FINALLY! I--


BOOM!

ARE YOU POSITIVE YOU CAN FLY THIS SHIP, ROOK'SHIR?
IT...IS AN UNUSUAL SHIP.

THE WORLD, SHI'AR SPACE.
HOME OF THE M'KRAAN CRYSTAL. SITE OF THE M'KRAAN XENOCIDE.
"HOW MUCH LONGER?"
HOW MUCH LONGER ARE WE GOING TO HIDE IN THIS GRAVEYARD? YOUR CONTACTS DON'T KNOW WHERE ALEX AND LORNA ARE, I CAN'T GET CLOSE ENOUGH TO READ ANYONE WHO KNOWS...
THEY COULD BE DEAD!
THIRD DEGREE BURN, LASER FIRE? NOTE: I SENSE YOU ARE VERY UPSET.
SHUT UP, INSECT.
MY CONTACTS FOUND US THIS SHIP, RACHEL. VULCAN IS KEEPING THE OTHERS ALIVE...HAVOK, POLARIS, EVEN CH'OD AND RAZA.
HAD HE KILLED THEM, HE WOULD LET THE WHOLE UNIVERSE KNOW.
WE WILL FIND THEM, RACHEL.
THIS IS MY EMPIRE, NOT VULCAN'S. NOT DEATHBIRD'S OR KA'ARDUM'S. MINE. AND I WILL HAVE IT BACK BEFORE THEY PLUNGE THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE INTO WAR.

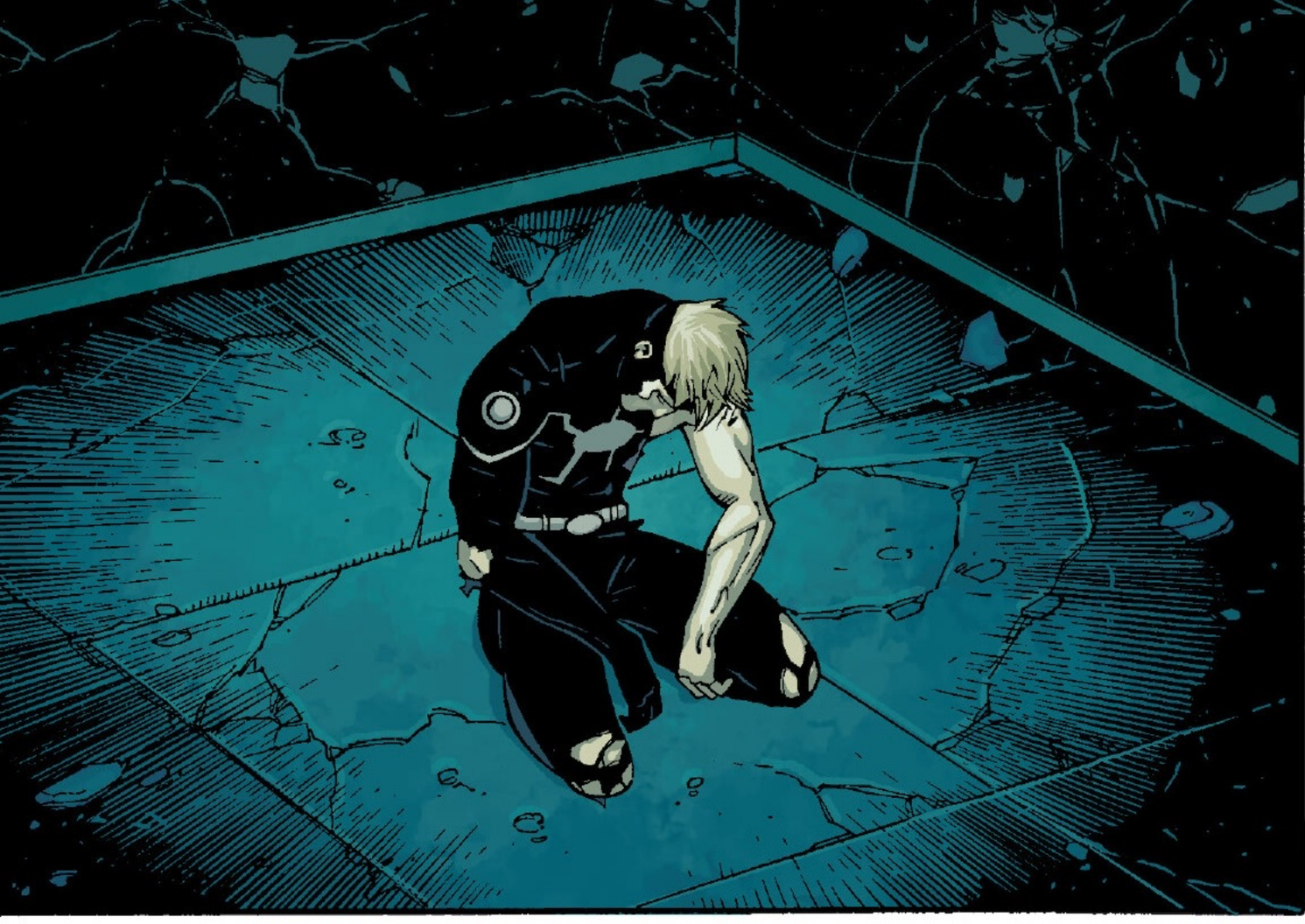

THE PLANET KR'KN, AT THE EDGE OF SHI'AR SPACE.
"...EVER SINCE YOUR INITIAL VISITS. AFTER YOU TOLD HIM ABOUT YOUR SPIES' REPORTS OF THE MUTANT ACTIVITY ON EARTH, WE BELIEVE HIS MIND HAS SNAPPED."
HE RESPONDS TO NOTHING, HE DOES NOTHING. YOU HAVE BROKEN HIM, MY EMPEROR.
WARDEN... YOU DON'T KNOW MY BROTHER.

"YOU'VE CONTINUED WORKING HIM OVER?"
X
ALEX SUMMERS, ALSO KNOWN AS HAVOK.
HE'S BEEN INTERROGATED, TORTURED...MADE TO LISTEN TO THE TORTURE OF HIS TEAMMATES. HE'S BEEN TOLD THE REMAINING STARJAMMERS ARE DEAD...
IT DOESN'T AFFECT HIM. NOTHING DOES.
AND HIS POWERS?
"GONE. FROM WHAT WE CAN TELL, HE ABSORBS AMBIENT COSMIC ENERGY. HIS FIRST FEW WEEKS HERE, HE EXPENDED EVERYTHING IN VIOLENT OUTBURSTS.
"BUT UNDER WATER, INSIDE THE PRISON WALLS...NO COSMIC ENERGY, NO POWER. HE'S GOT NOTHING LEFT."
I KNOW YOU'RE THERE, GABRIEL.
I CAN FEEL YOU.
SHOW ME THE OTHERS.

RAZA LONGKNIFE.
"HE KEPT PIECING TOGETHER WEAPONS OUT OF HIS CYBERNETIC PARTS. WE'VE SINCE HAD THEM REMOVED."
"AGAIN, MY EMPEROR, WE RECOMMEND EXECUTION FOR ALL FOUR PRISONERS."
"NOT YET."
"THIS ONE, LONGKNIFE...HE'S KILLED EIGHT GUARDS SINCE HE'S BEEN HERE.
CH'OD.
SSSSSS
"THE LIZARD?"
"ALMOST IMPERVIOUS TO TORTURE. AND HE'S BEEN TORTURED THE MOST.
"HIS MANNER... IT UPSETS THE TORTURERS."
REALLY? THIS IS IT? *HRM.* YOUR LINES LACK CONFIDENCE, AND THE COMPLETE ABSENCE OF STYLE IS SAD, YES? YOU SHOULD TRY AGAIN.

THE EARTHER MUTANT.
LORNA DANE, ALSO KNOWN AS POLARIS.
WHY IS SHE ASLEEP?
MY LORD...WE WERE FORCED TO DRUG HER. NOTHING ELSE WE'VE TRIED HAS WORKED.
WE KEEP MODIFYING THE POWER DAMPENER, BUT SHE KEEPS SHORTING IT OUT. AND THE DRUGS...SOMETHING IN HER SYSTEM IS BURNING OUT THE DRUGS AS WELL. SOMETHING BEYOND ANY MUTANT POWERS WE'VE EVER SEEN...
LORNA DANE...WHAT'S INSIDE YOU?
FINE. MORE DRUGS. RECORD HER BEING INJECTED, SHOW THE VIDEO TO HAVOK. MAKE IT PAIN--
ALEX...

WHAT... WHERE IS... WHERE...
VULCAN.
DAMN IT. GET THE SYRINGE, NOW!
VULCAN!!!
HNN!
AAAH!!
KILL YOU, GABRIEL! I'M GOING TO--
BACK TO SLEEP.
CRACK!
FIND OUT WHAT'S MAKING HER SO POWERFUL.
AND YOU MAY WANT TO UP THE DOSAGE AGAIN.



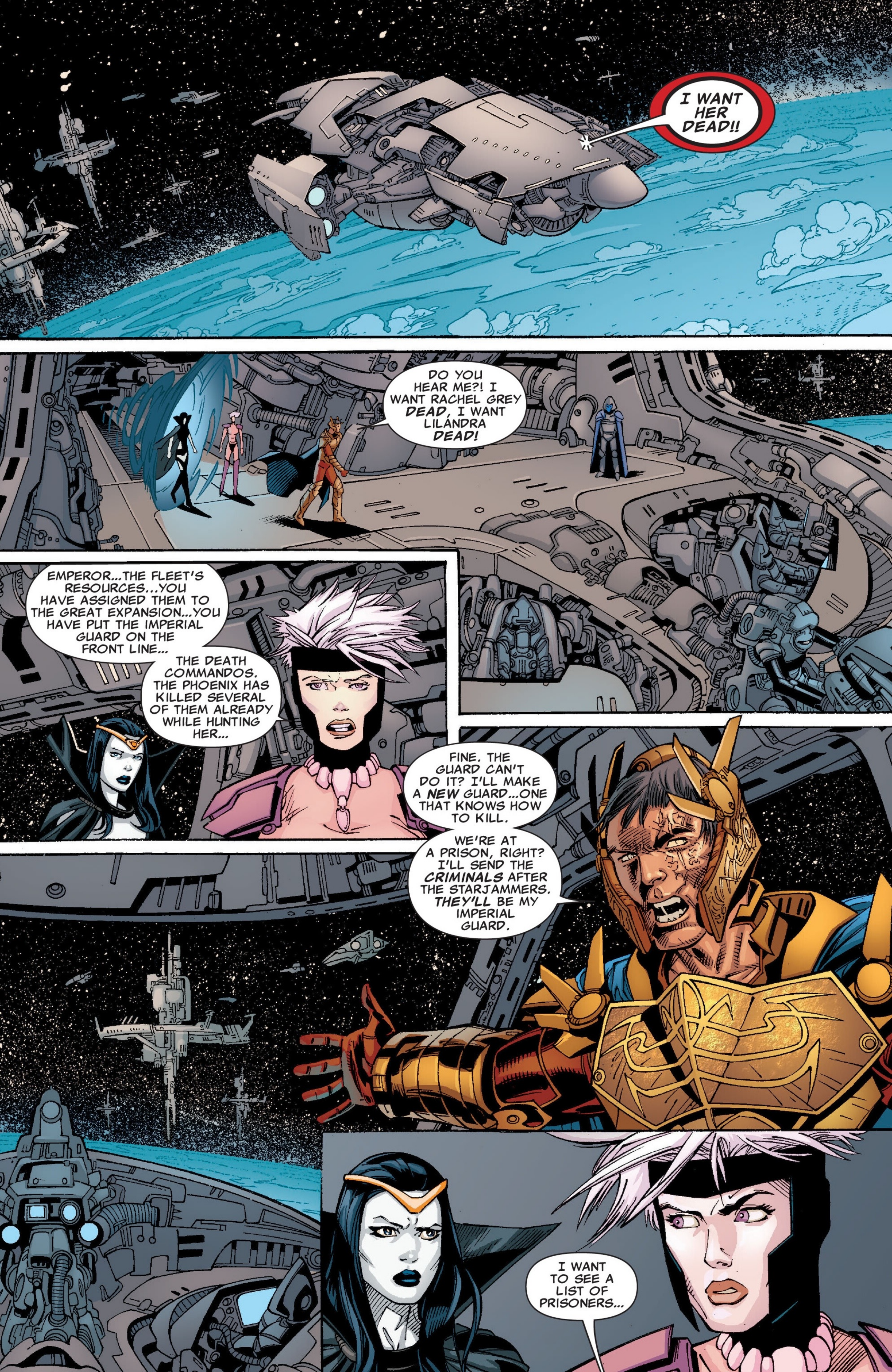
AND IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT, BIG BROTHER.

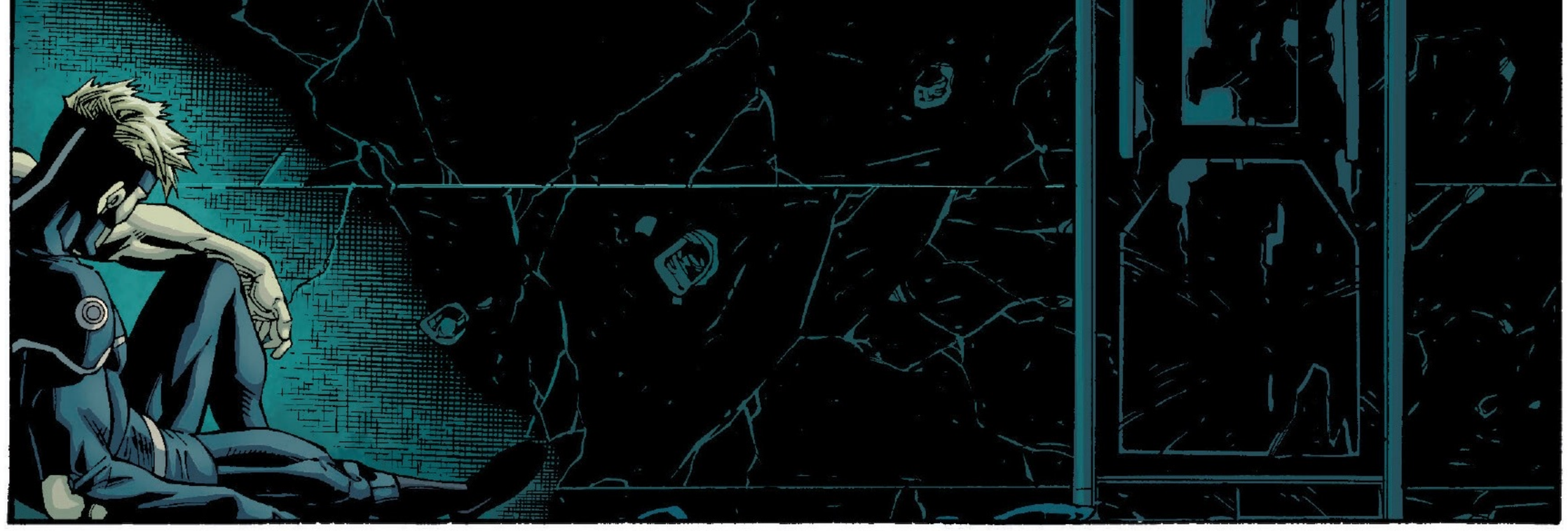
YOU ARE SO SAD, GABRIEL. YOU'RE LIKE A CHILD, TRYING TO HURT ME. IT'S PATHETIC, REALLY.

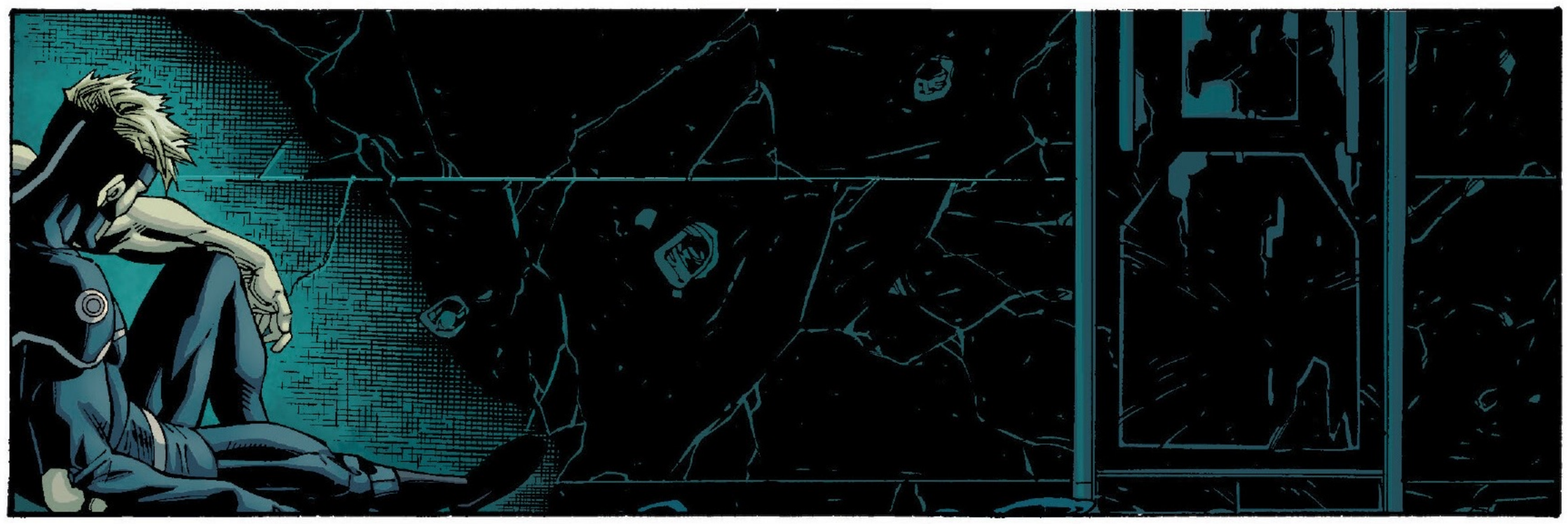
I CAN WAIT AS LONG AS IT TAKES, GABRIEL. BECAUSE I'VE ALREADY ***WON.***

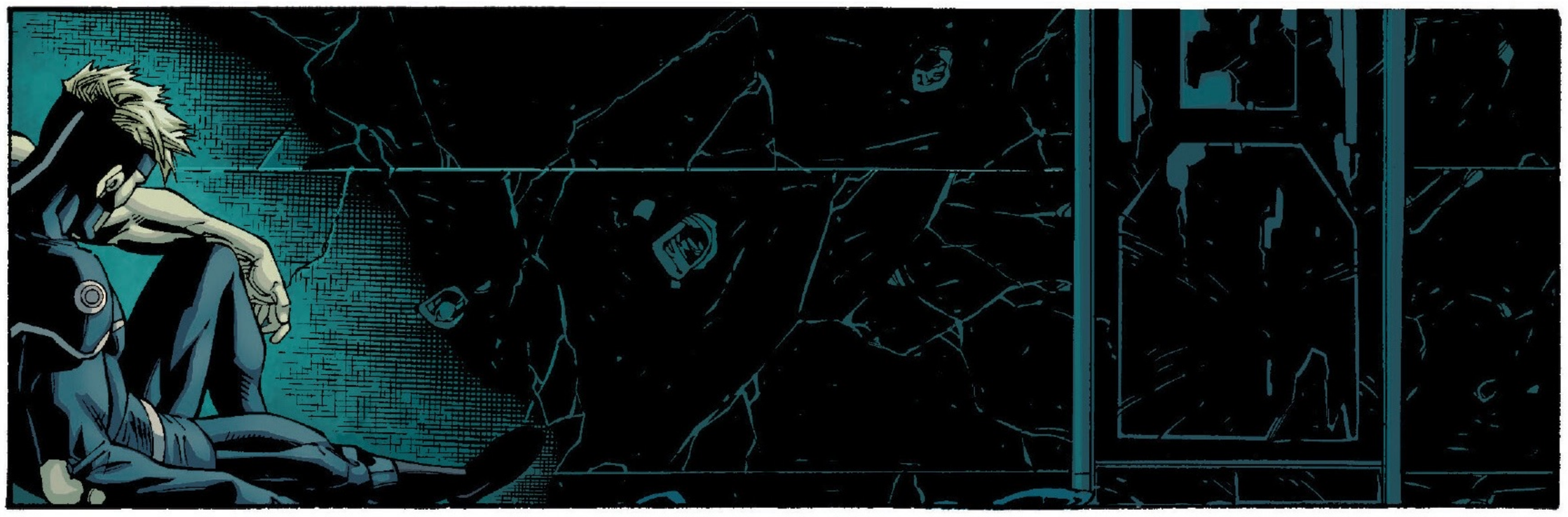
BECAUSE EVEN THOUGH YOU RULE AN ***EMPIRE,*** YOU'RE STILL COMING TO ME. SO DESPERATE FOR ME TO BOW DOWN TO YOU.

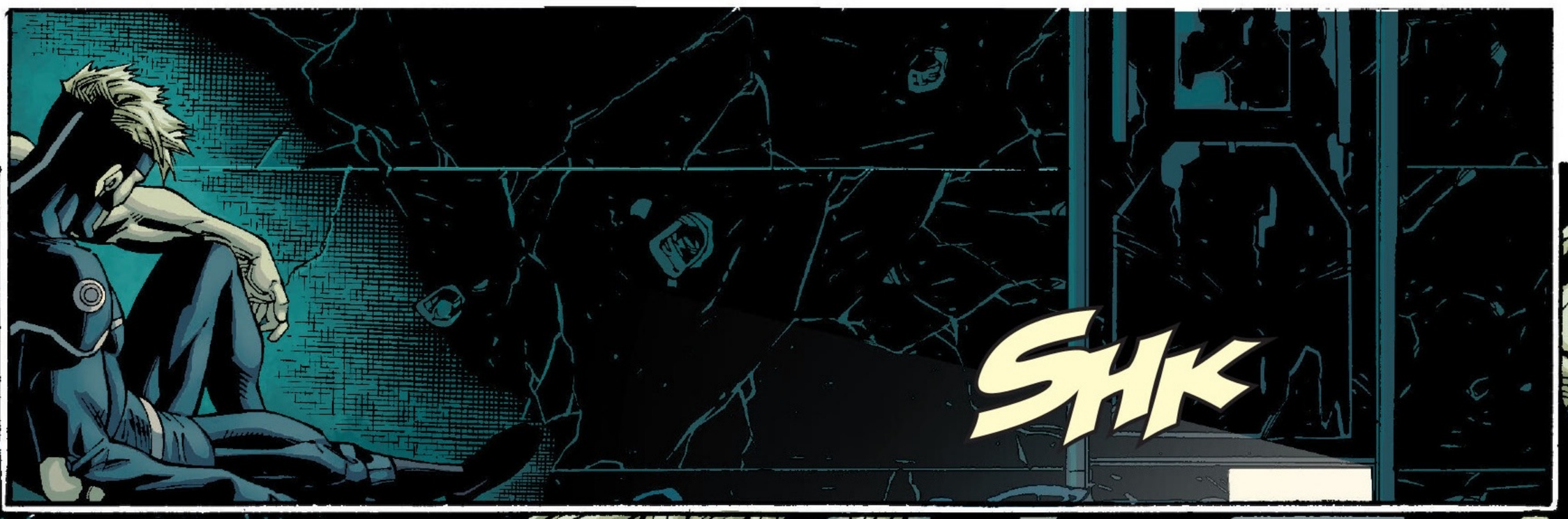
AND IT'S NEVER GOING TO HAPPEN.
I CAN KILL YOU ANYTIME I WANT. I CAN KILL LORNA ANYTIME I WANT. I CAN GO TO EARTH AND KILL SCOTT...
JUST LIKE I KILLED OUR FATHER!
I REMEMBER, GABRIEL.
END TRANSMISSION!
EMPEROR... APOLOGIES, BUT THERE HAS BEEN ANOTHER ATTACK.

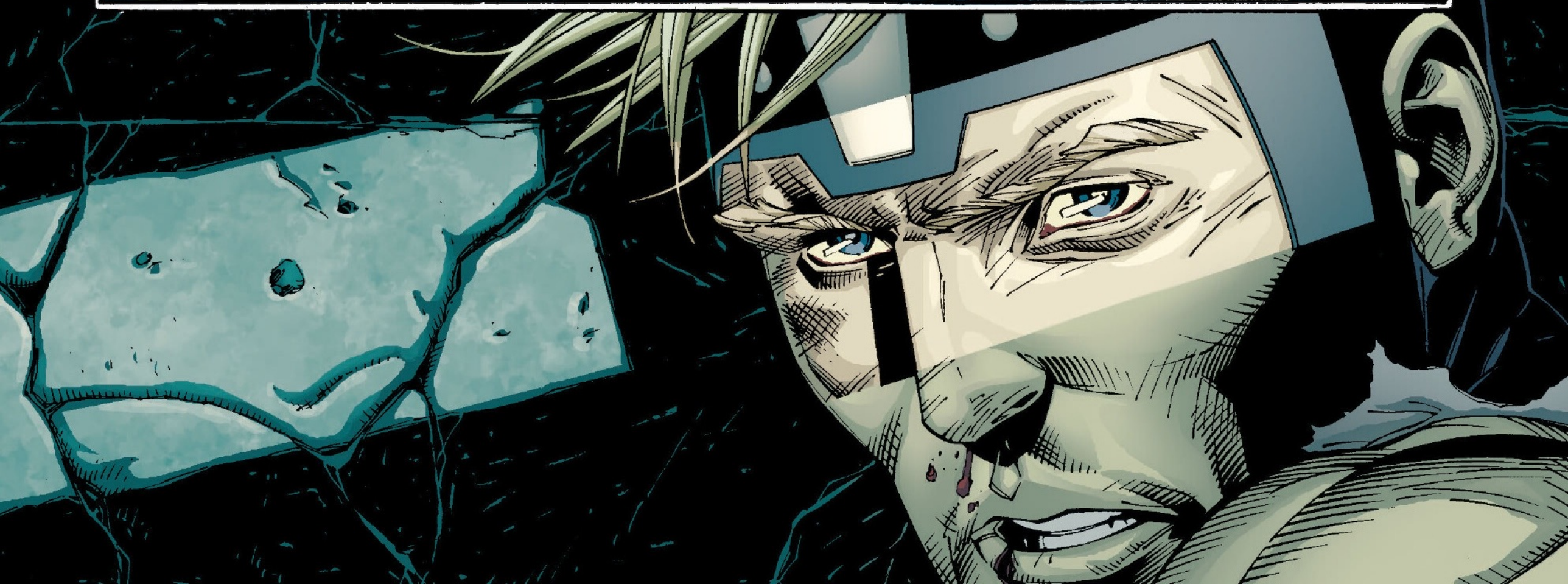

I WANT HER DEAD!!
DO YOU HEAR ME?! I WANT RACHEL GREY DEAD, I WANT LILANDRA DEAD!
EMPEROR...THE FLEET'S RESOURCES...YOU HAVE ASSIGNED THEM TO THE GREAT EXPANSION...YOU HAVE PUT THE IMPERIAL GUARD ON THE FRONT LINE...
THE DEATH COMMANDOS. THE PHOENIX HAS KILLED SEVERAL OF THEM ALREADY WHILE HUNTING HER...
FINE. THE GUARD CAN'T DO IT? I'LL MAKE A NEW GUARD...ONE THAT KNOWS HOW TO KILL.
WE'RE AT A PRISON, RIGHT? I'LL SEND THE CRIMINALS AFTER THE STARJAMMERS. THEY'LL BE MY IMPERIAL GUARD.
I WANT TO SEE A LIST OF PRISONERS...








SHK



SHMT

X-MEN: KINGBREAKER 2

"...SOME KIND OF *SYMBIOTE*, WE HAD NEVER ENCOUNTERED ANYTHING LIKE IT. D'KEN WANTED IT STUDIED, BUT AFTER HE DIED, IT JUST REMAINED LOCKED AWAY.

"MY LORD...IT IS A *MONSTROSITY*. IT FEEDS ON PEOPLE. IT CONSUMES THEIR BRAINS..."

"THEN IF IT WANTS A FRESH MEAL, IT WILL DO AS I TELL IT. WHAT ELSE?"

"A SURVIVOR FROM THE RECENT *UNCREATED* INVASION. IT SOMEHOW SURVIVED THE MASS SUICIDE, AND WAS CAPTURED.

"WHEN IT AWOKE, THE CREATURE WENT *MAD*, KILLING EVERYONE IT SAW, WANTING TO KNOW IF THEY WORSHIPPED A GOD...SO THE UNCREATED COULD FIND IT AND *KILL* IT."

"I THINK I CAN FIND A GOD FOR IT TO KILL."

"THE *PN'ZO*...WE DO NOT KNOW IF THAT IS ITS RACE OR NAME. ITS ABILITIES... WE SIMPLY DO NOT UNDERSTAND THEM."

"WHAT DID IT WANT?"

"IT...IT... SIRE, IT WAS ROBBING A BANK."

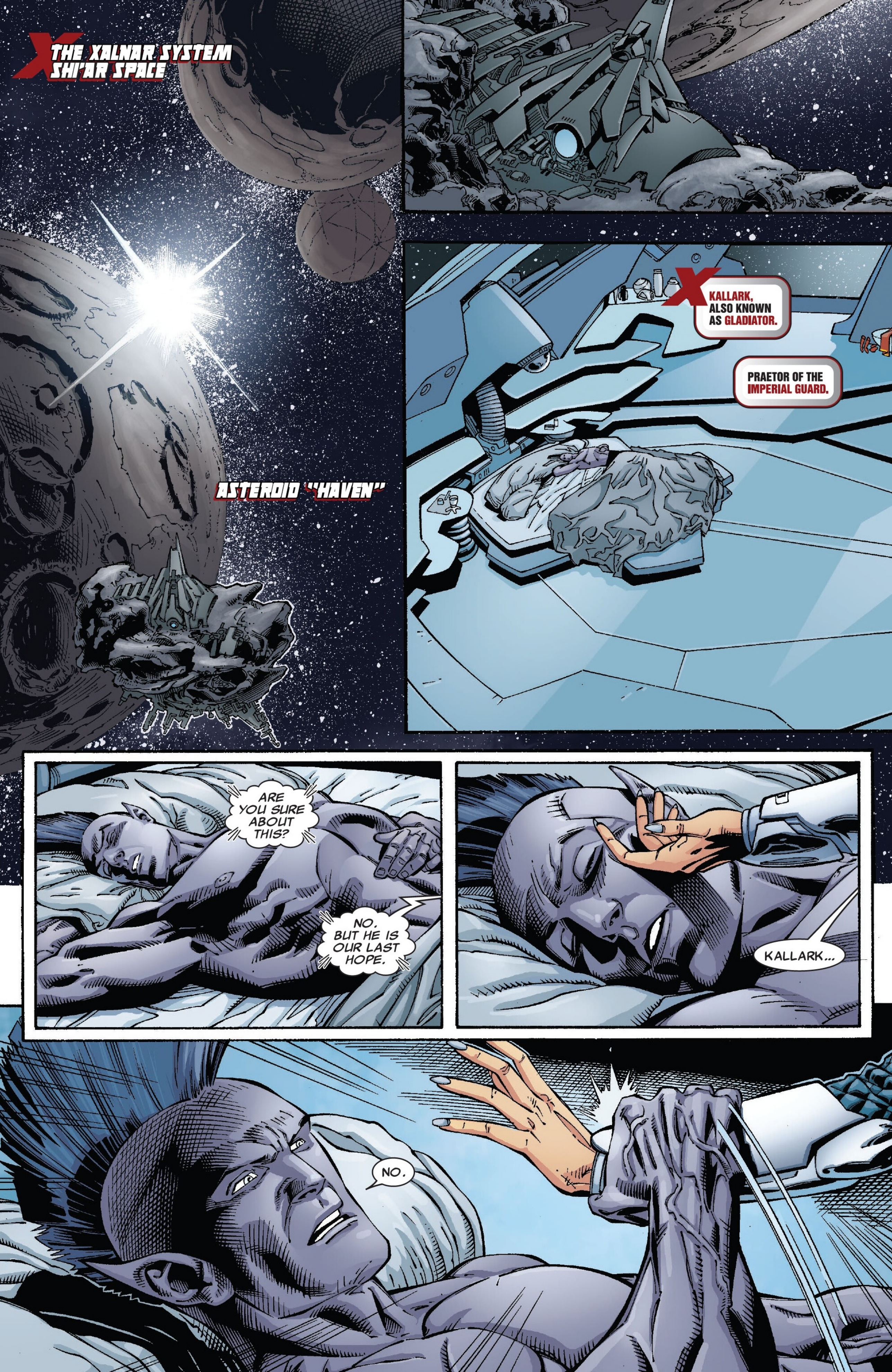
"AND THE *HODINN*?"

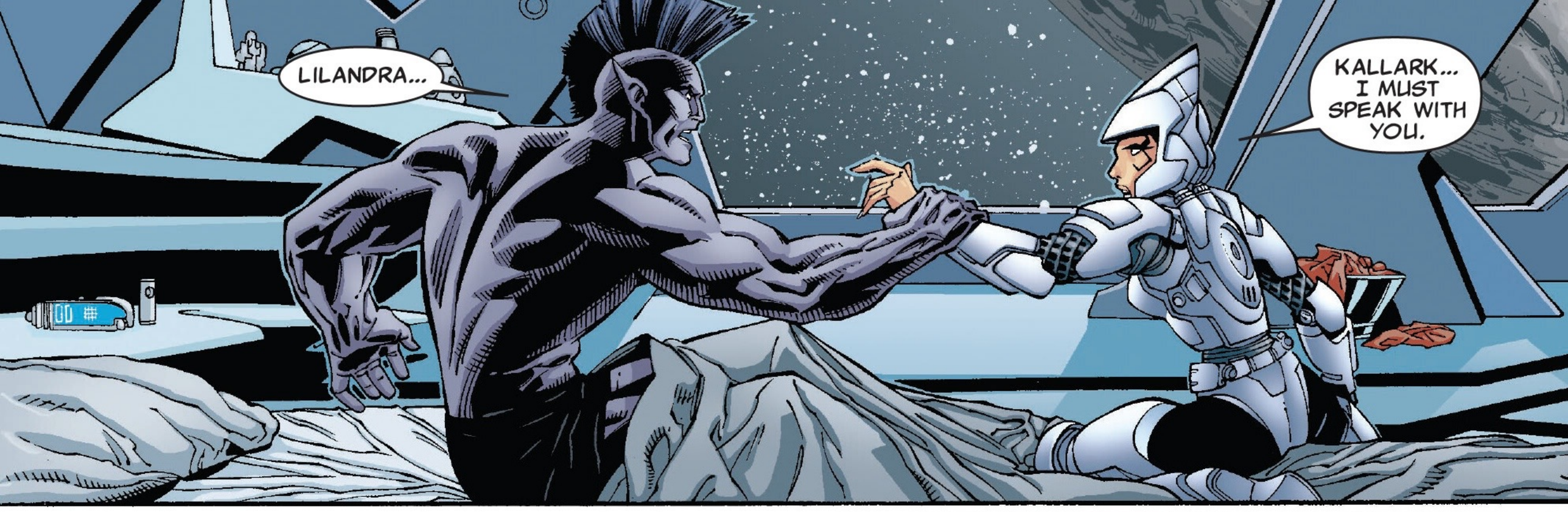
"EMPEROR...A HODINN SERVED ON THE GUARD PREVIOUSLY... BEFORE CASSANDRA NOVA. BUT THIS ONE... IT IS MAD.

"IT JUST WANTS TO BURN."

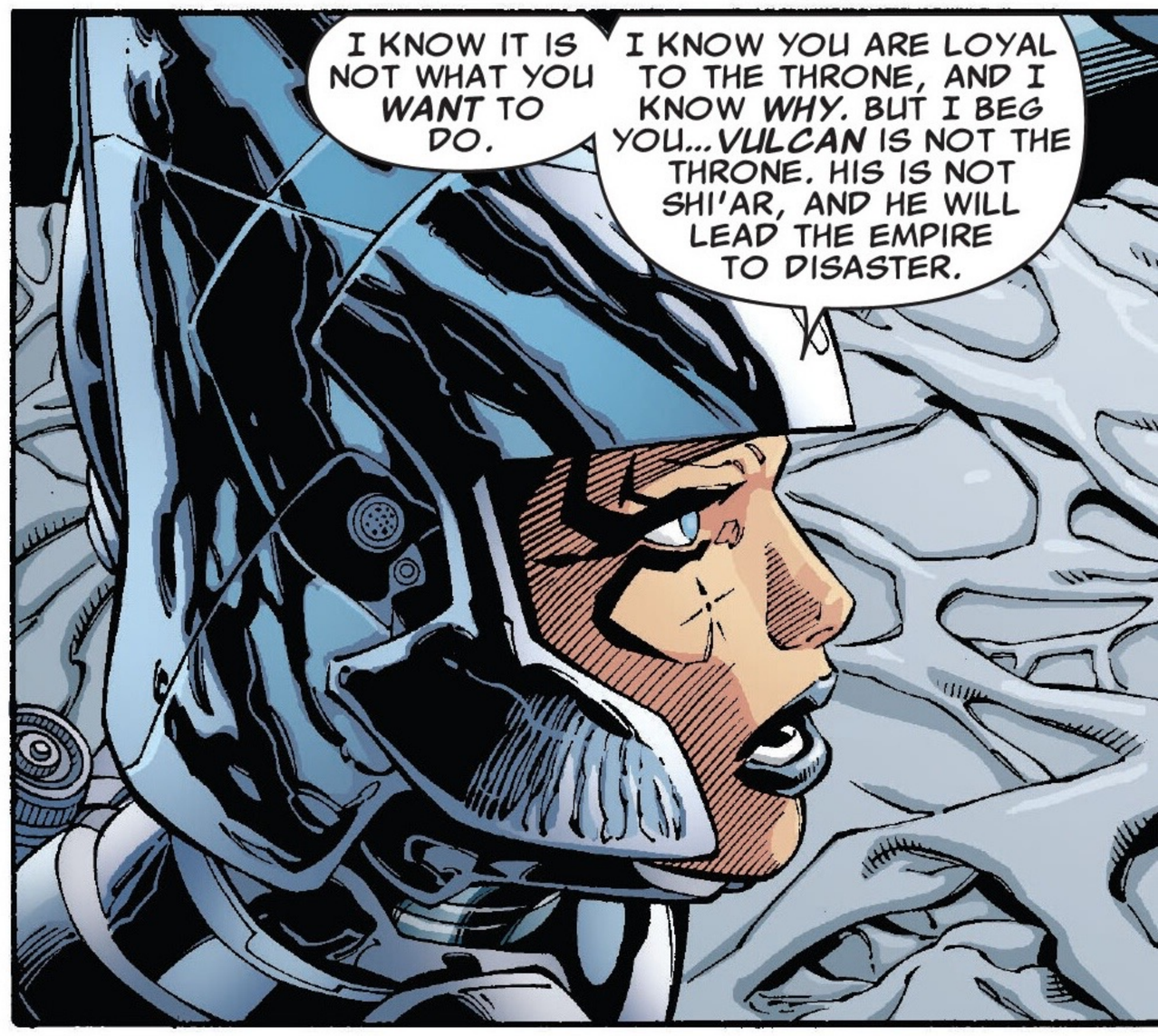
"YOU SAY THAT LIKE IT'S A BAD THING, ORACLE."
X KR'KN
PLEASE, MY EMPEROR... DO NOT DO THIS.
THESE ANIMALS ARE IMPRISONED FOR A REASON. THEY ARE THE MOST DANGEROUS CREATURES THE SHI'AR HAVE EVER ENCOUNTERED...AND KEPT ALIVE.
ARE YOU SCARED OF THEM?
...YES.
THEN THEY'LL DO.
OPEN THEM.

"THAT WASN'T SO BAD, NOW, WAS IT?"
THE UNCREATED KILLED FOUR OF YOUR SOLDIERS.
I DIDN'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY. EVERYONE WANTS SOMETHING, ORACLE. EVEN THIS ONE.
EMPEROR... YOU CANNOT GIVE KALLARK TO HER.
LET ME WORRY ABOUT GLADIATOR.
HAIL, STRONTIAN. MY NAME IS VULCAN.
I AM YOUR EMPEROR.
LEAVE BEFORE I KILL YOU.
CUTE. LISTEN TO ME...I KNOW WHO YOU ARE. I KNOW WHAT YOU WANT. AND IF YOU DO AS I SAY...
...I'LL GIVE IT TO YOU.

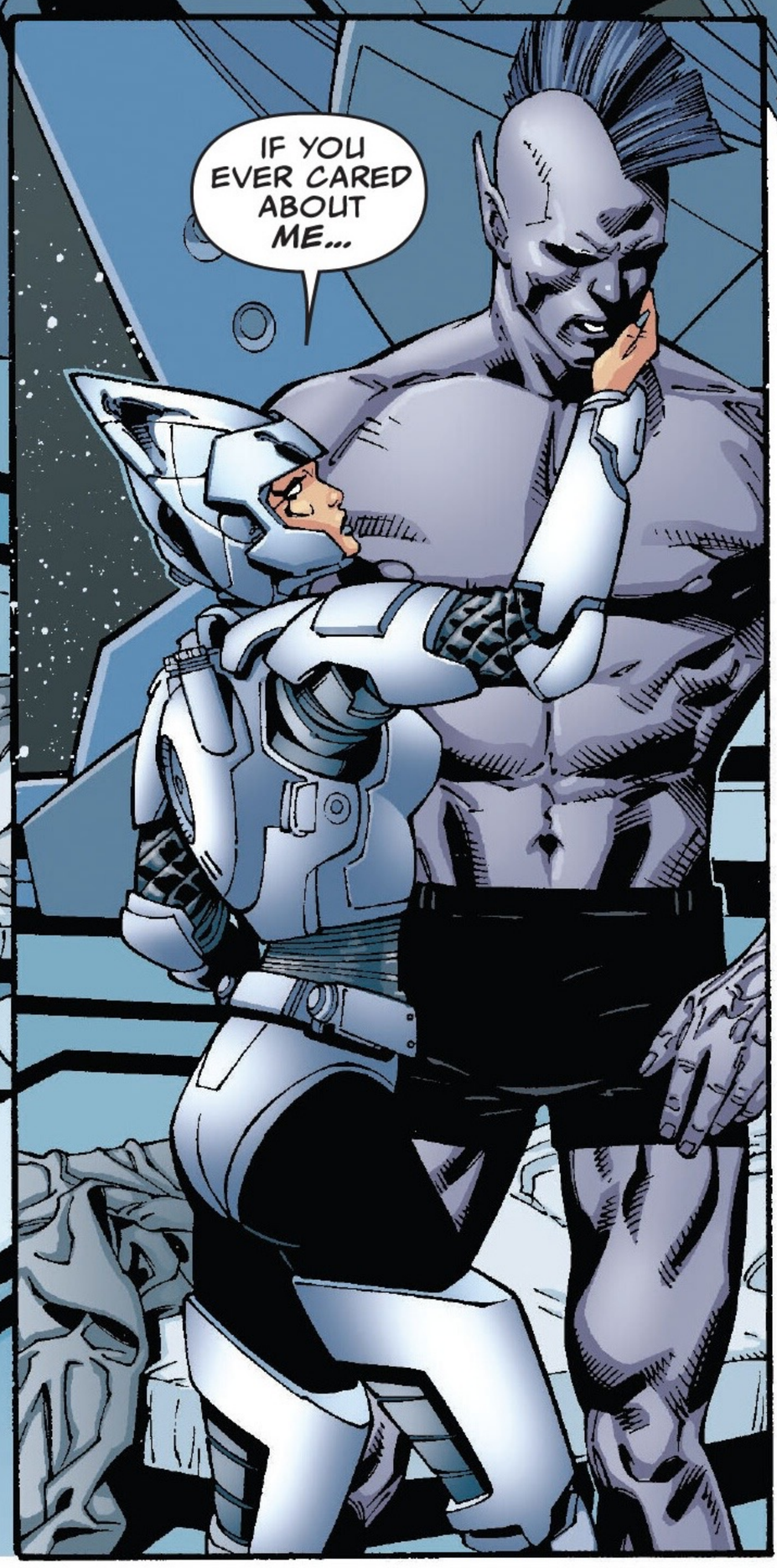

THE XALNAR SYSTEM
SHI'AR SPACE
ASTEROID "HAVEN"
KALLARK, ALSO KNOWN AS GLADIATOR.
PRAETOR OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD.
ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THIS?
NO. BUT HE IS OUR LAST HOPE.
KALLARK...
NO.


LILANDRA...
KALLARK... I MUST SPEAK WITH YOU.

WHY HAVE YOU COME HERE? YOU CANNOT SURRENDER...HE WILL *KILL* YOU!
I AM NOT HERE TO SURRENDER.
YOU SHOULD *NOT* HAVE COME HERE, EMPRESS! YOU KNOW WHAT I MUST NOW DO!

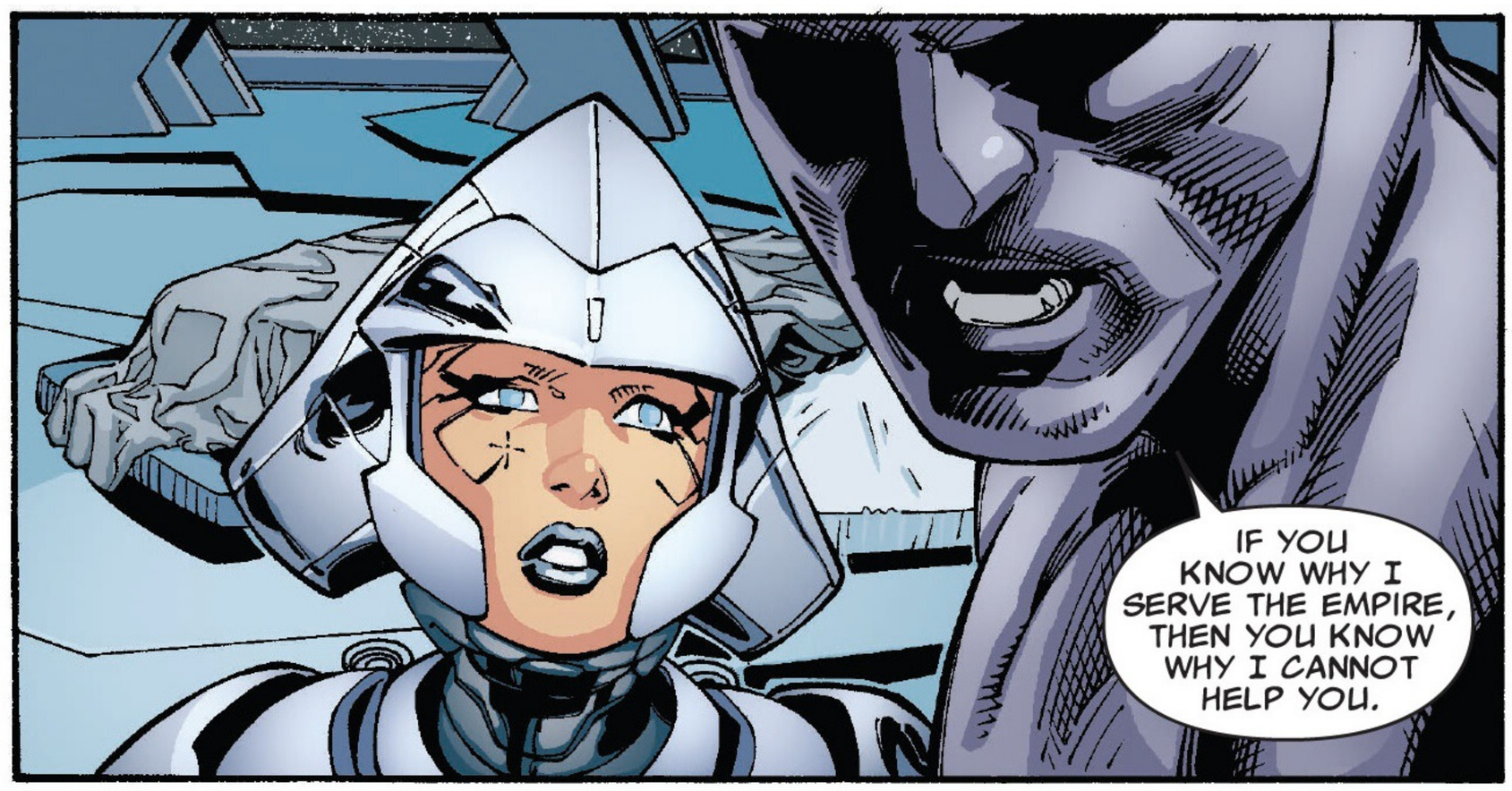

I KNOW IT IS NOT WHAT YOU *WANT* TO DO.
I KNOW YOU ARE LOYAL TO THE THRONE, AND I KNOW *WHY*. BUT I BEG YOU...*VULCAN* IS NOT THE THRONE. HIS IS NOT SHI'AR, AND HE WILL LEAD THE EMPIRE TO DISASTER.

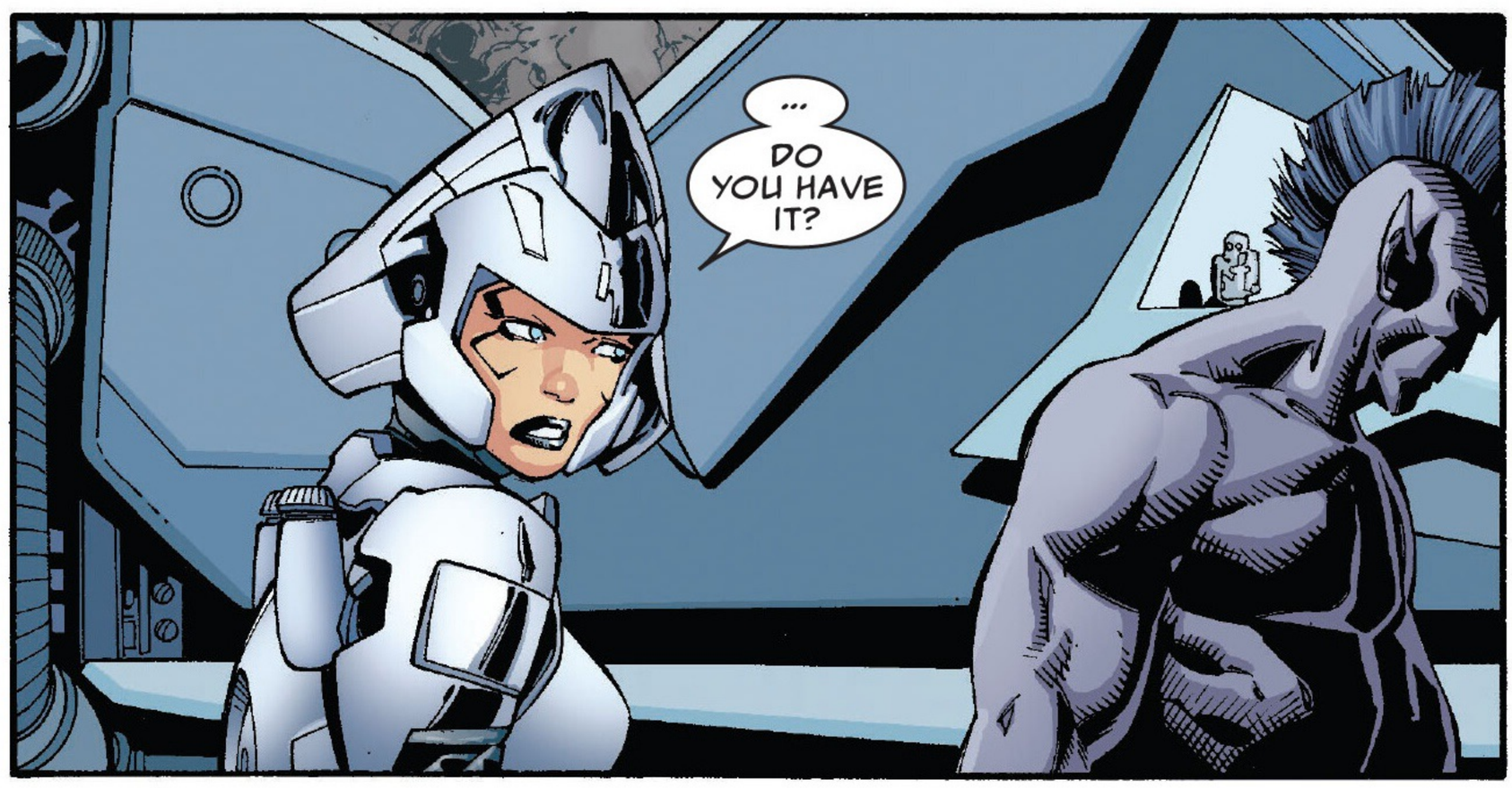
IF YOU TRULY CARE ABOUT THE EMPIRE...
I CANNOT THINK...


IF YOU EVER CARED ABOUT *ME*...

EMPRESS...

...THEN HELP ME. HELP ME FIND HAVOK AND DEFEAT VULCAN.


IF YOU KNOW WHY I SERVE THE EMPIRE, THEN YOU KNOW WHY I CANNOT HELP YOU.


...
DO YOU HAVE IT?

WHAT? EMPRESS?

I AM TRULY SORRY, KALLARK. BUT LIKE YOU, I DO WHAT I MUST FOR THE EMPIRE'S SURVIVAL.
GOT IT.
THEY'RE ON KR'KN.
NOW.

CHOOOM!
HANG ON!!
HNNN!!
LILANDRA!!
VMMM!!
RRRAAAA!!!
EMPRESS...

"WE SHOULD JUST KILL THEM."

THE EMPEROR SAYS OTHERWISE. PERHAPS HE INTENDS FOR THE EARTHERS TO DIE OF OLD AGE.

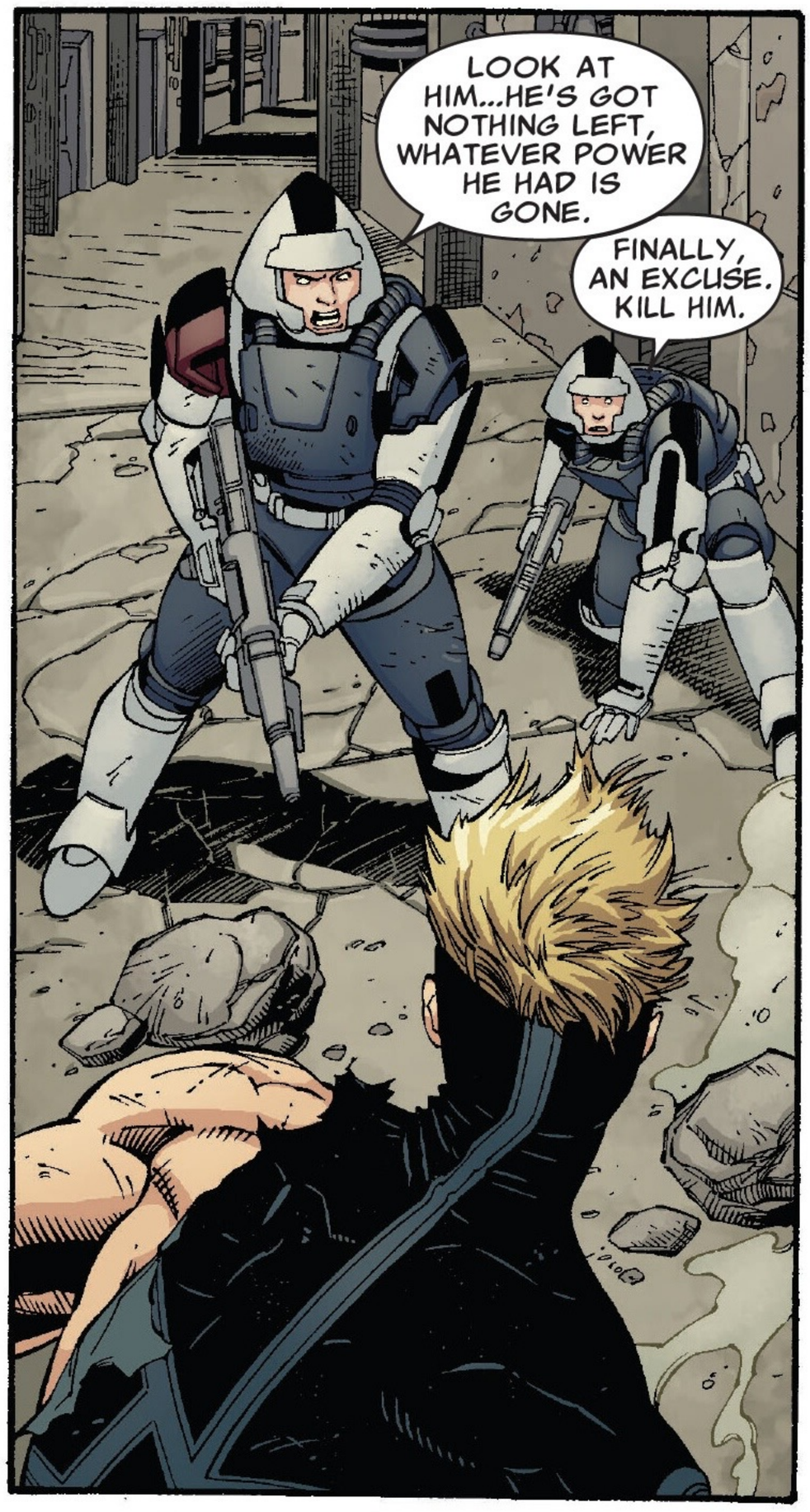
HOW LONG DO THEY LIVE, ANYWAY?

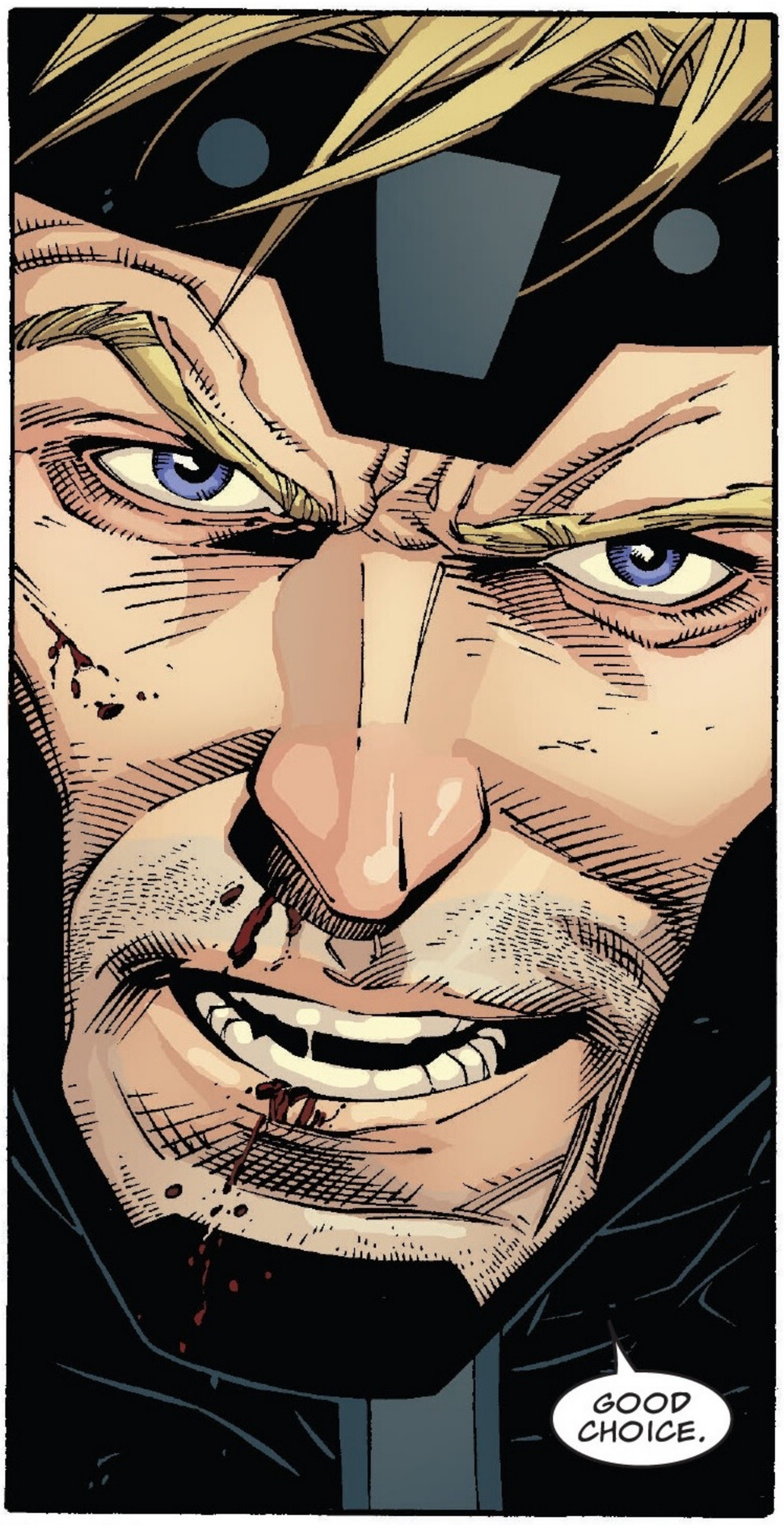
IT DOESN'T MATTER. FOURTEEN SYSTEMS HAVE FALLEN TO THE SHI'AR SINCE VULCAN ASCENDED AS EMPEROR.

IF HE WANTS THEM ALIVE, WE KEEP THEM ALIVE.

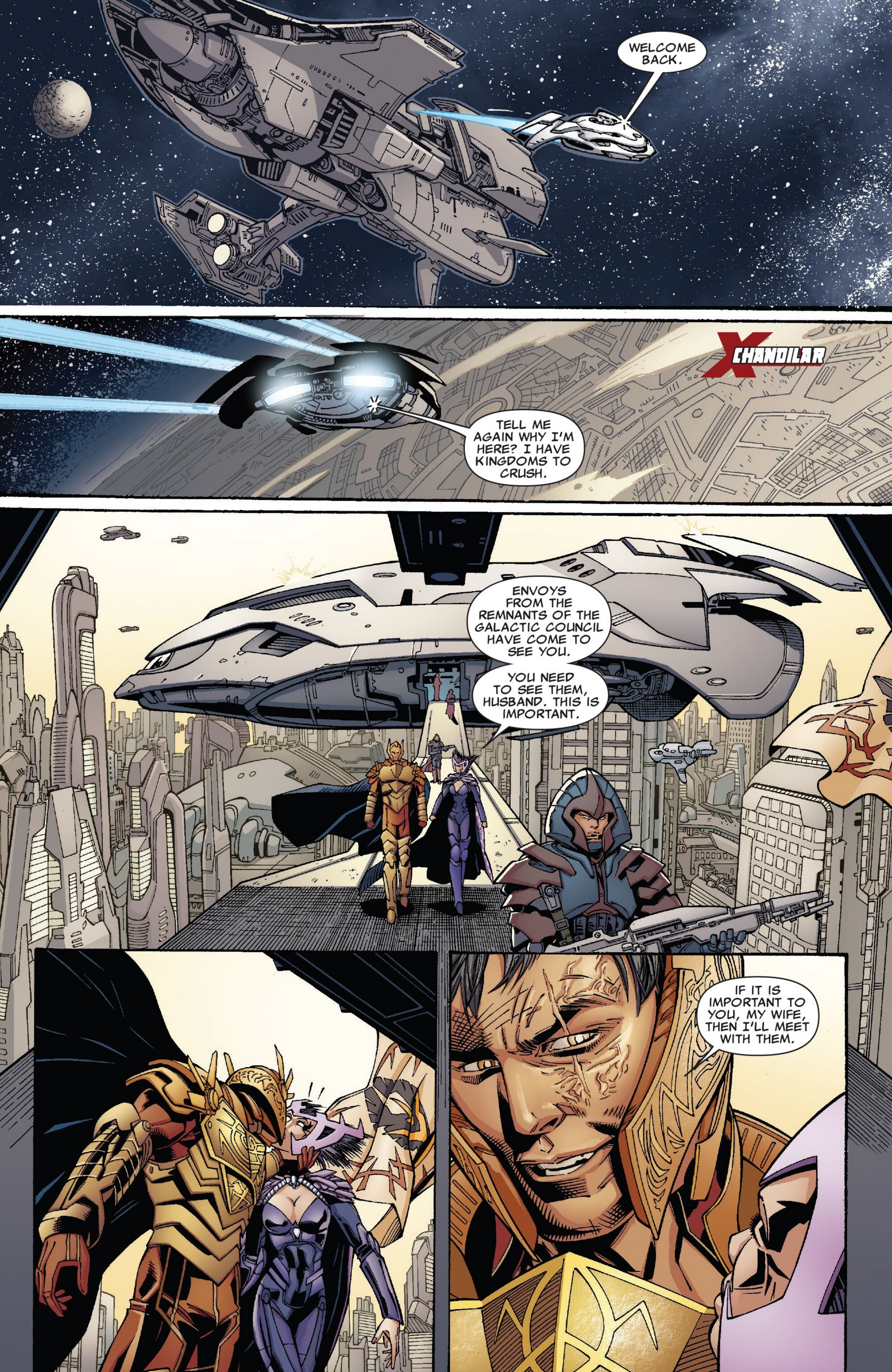
HMPH. EMPEROR OR NOT, I STILL SAY WE SHOULD KILL--

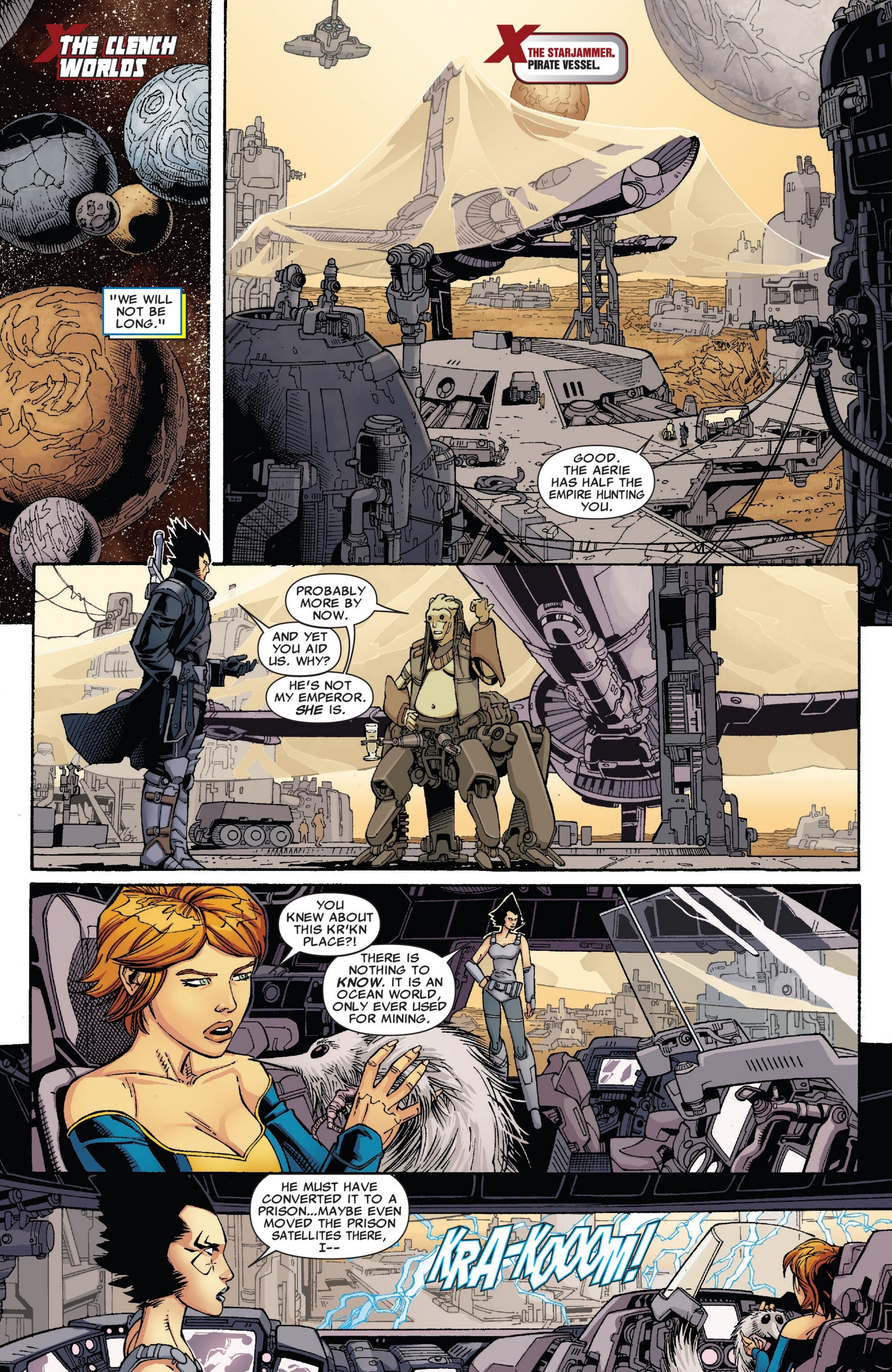
RUN.


LOOK AT HIM...HE'S GOT NOTHING LEFT, WHATEVER POWER HE HAD IS GONE.
FINALLY, AN EXCUSE. KILL HIM.


GOOD CHOICE.

ZARK!! ZARK!!
THUNK!
WATCH OUT! WATCH-- HURKK!!
HT--!
HUHH... HUHH... HU...
...


WELCOME BACK.
X CHANDILAR
TELL ME AGAIN WHY I'M HERE? I HAVE KINGDOMS TO CRUSH.
ENVOYS FROM THE REMNANTS OF THE GALACTIC COUNCIL HAVE COME TO SEE YOU.
YOU NEED TO SEE THEM, HUSBAND. THIS IS IMPORTANT.
IF IT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU, MY WIFE, THEN I'LL MEET WITH THEM.


THE CLENCH WORLDS
"WE WILL NOT BE LONG."
THE STARJAMMER. PIRATE VESSEL.
GOOD. THE AERIE HAS HALF THE EMPIRE HUNTING YOU.
PROBABLY MORE BY NOW.
AND YET YOU AID US. WHY?
HE'S NOT MY EMPEROR. SHE IS.
YOU KNEW ABOUT THIS KR'KN PLACE?!
THERE IS NOTHING TO KNOW. IT IS AN OCEAN WORLD, ONLY EVER USED FOR MINING.
HE MUST HAVE CONVERTED IT TO A PRISON...MAYBE EVEN MOVED THE PRISON SATELLITES THERE, I--
KRA-KOOOM!

WHAT IN SHARRA'S--
SPREAD OUT. FIND THE WOMEN.
KILL THEM ALL.
OH, GODS.
I AM SORRY FOR WHAT IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN, DOCKMASTER. YOU SHOULD RUN.
VMMMM!

WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?!
I...I DON'T KNOW! RACHEL, WAIT! THINK! WE HAVE TO HAVE A--
FWOOOSH!!
--PLAN. WONDERFUL.
HSSSSS!!!
KYTHRI PRESERVE.
SHRACK!!
RRRAAA!!
YOU... YOU'RE LIKE HIM...LIKE--
SAY IT! SAY HIS NAME!
GET AWAY FROM HIM!!

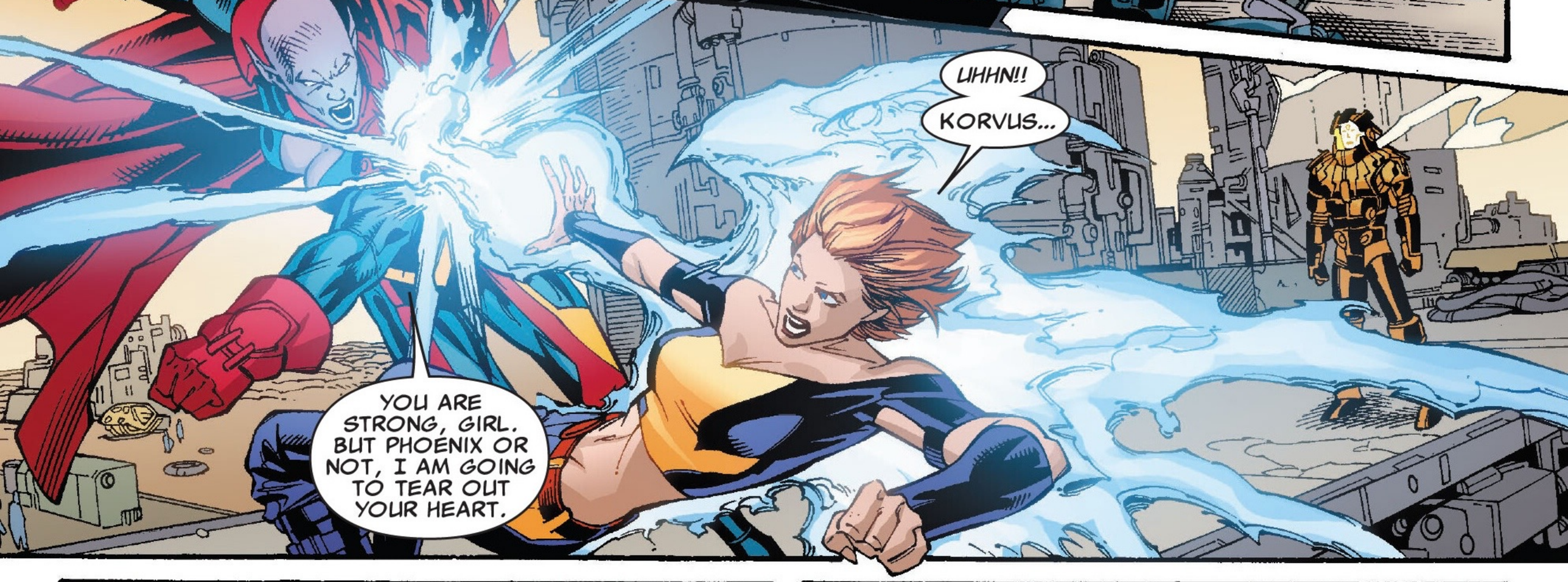
AAAAAHHHH!!

WE TASTE YOU...SO LONG, WE HAVE HUNGERED...
...KILL...ME. PLEASE...
SQUEEE!!
SPECIES: UNKNOWN. BIOSCAN SUGGESTS SENSITIVITY TO ELECTRICITY.
...DO NOT FIGHT... WE CAN BE TOGETHER...
NO...NO! THIS CANNOT...I WILL NOT LET THIS HAPPEN!!
EEEEEEEEEEE!
RAAAA!

VZZZZ!!
AAARGHH!!

...BIG METAL SWORD, GOOD CONDUCTOR...
...GONNA SELL AFTER YOU DIE, BIRDIE. PHOENIX SWORD, PRETTY PRICE...
YOU'LL... HAVE TO... KILL ME...

...FIRST!!
URK!!
RECANT! RECANT NOW! WHERE IS YOUR GOD? WHERE IS YOUR PHOENIX?
HURRR... GET OUT... GET OUT OF MY HEAD!!


UHHN!!
KORVUS...
YOU ARE STRONG, GIRL. BUT PHOENIX OR NOT, I AM GOING TO TEAR OUT YOUR HEART.

NO.

BURN IT OUT.
BURN IT ALL.

THE REMNANTS OF THE COUNCIL RESPECT YOUR POSITION AND ACKNOWLEDGE YOU AS EMPEROR OF THE SHI'AR.

UH-HUH. NOW WHAT DO YOU *WANT?*

AS YOU MAY OR MAY NOT KNOW, THE KNOWN GALAXIES HAVE SUFFERED SEVERAL CRISES OF LATE, FROM THE ANNIHILATION WAVE TO THE CONQUEST OF THE KREE...

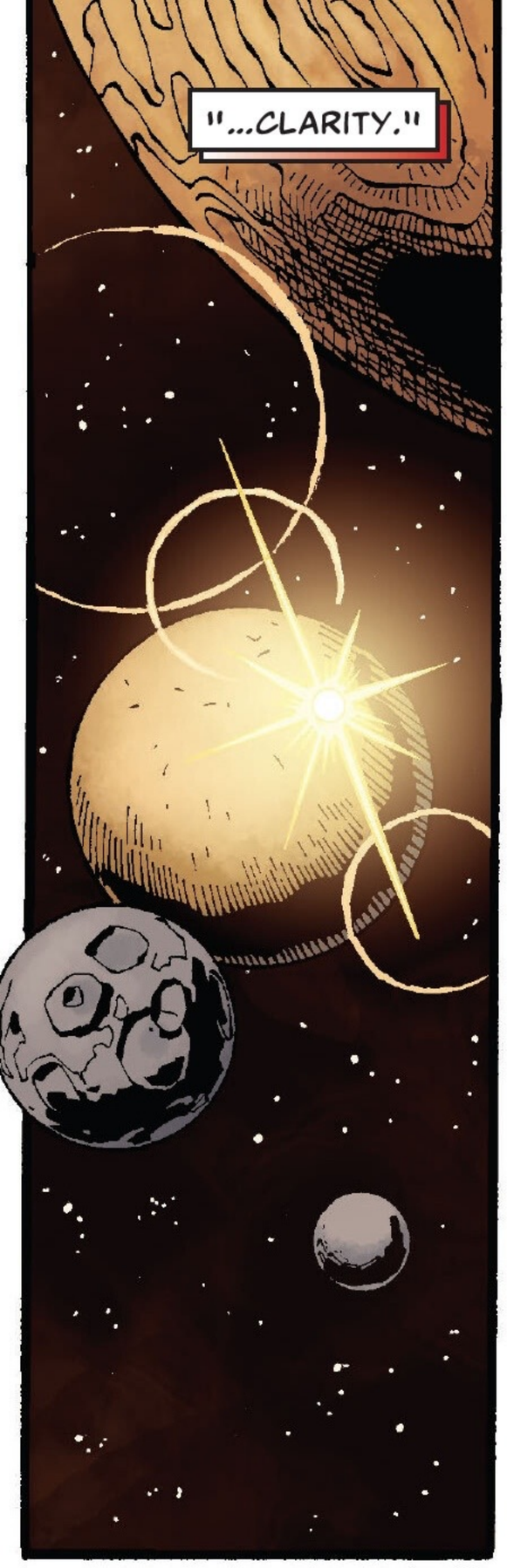
THE SHI'AR'S LACK OF SUPPORT DURING THESE EVENTS HAS THE COUNCIL CONCERNED.

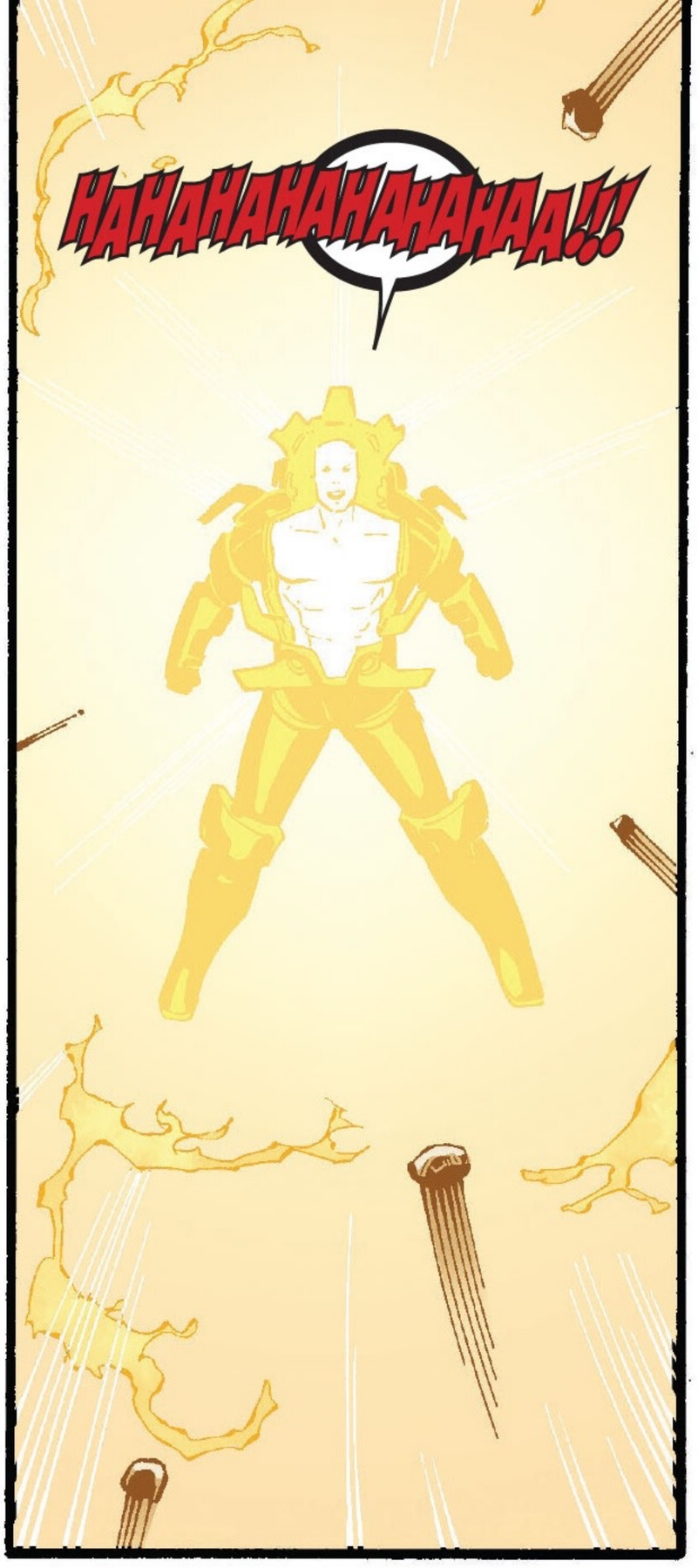
PERHAPS I SHOULD HAVE MADE MY INTENTIONS CLEAR TO THE GALACTIC COUNCIL FROM THE START.

THIS IS HOW I VIEW THE SHI'AR ROLE IN UNIVERSAL AFFAIRS...

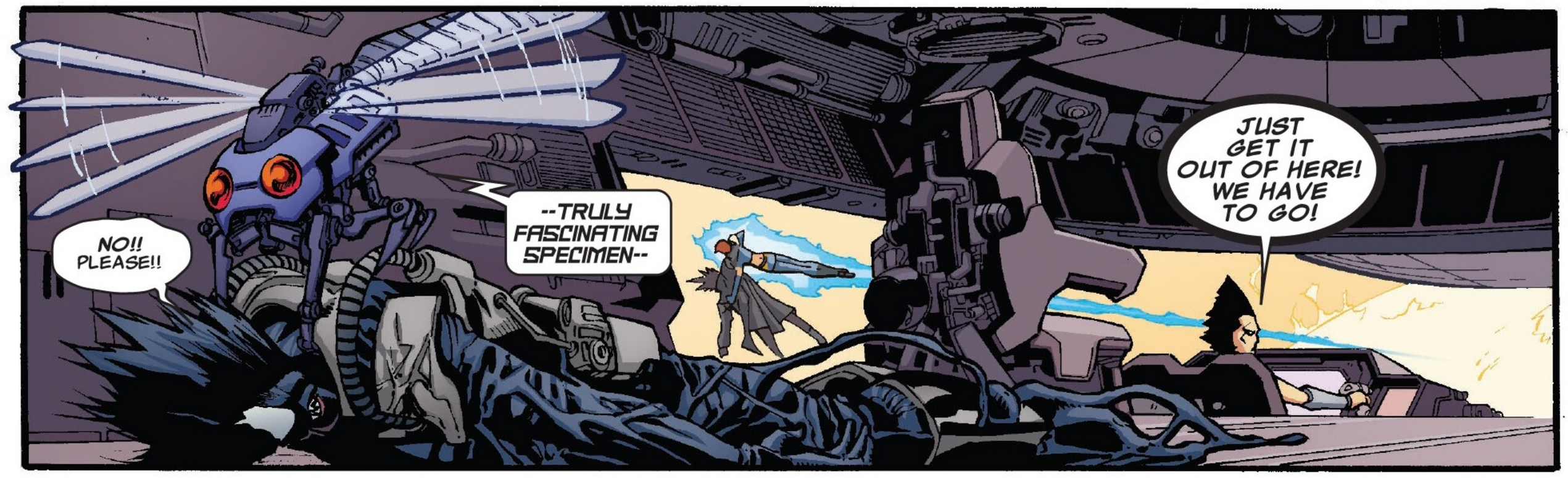
SHRAAAAWWW

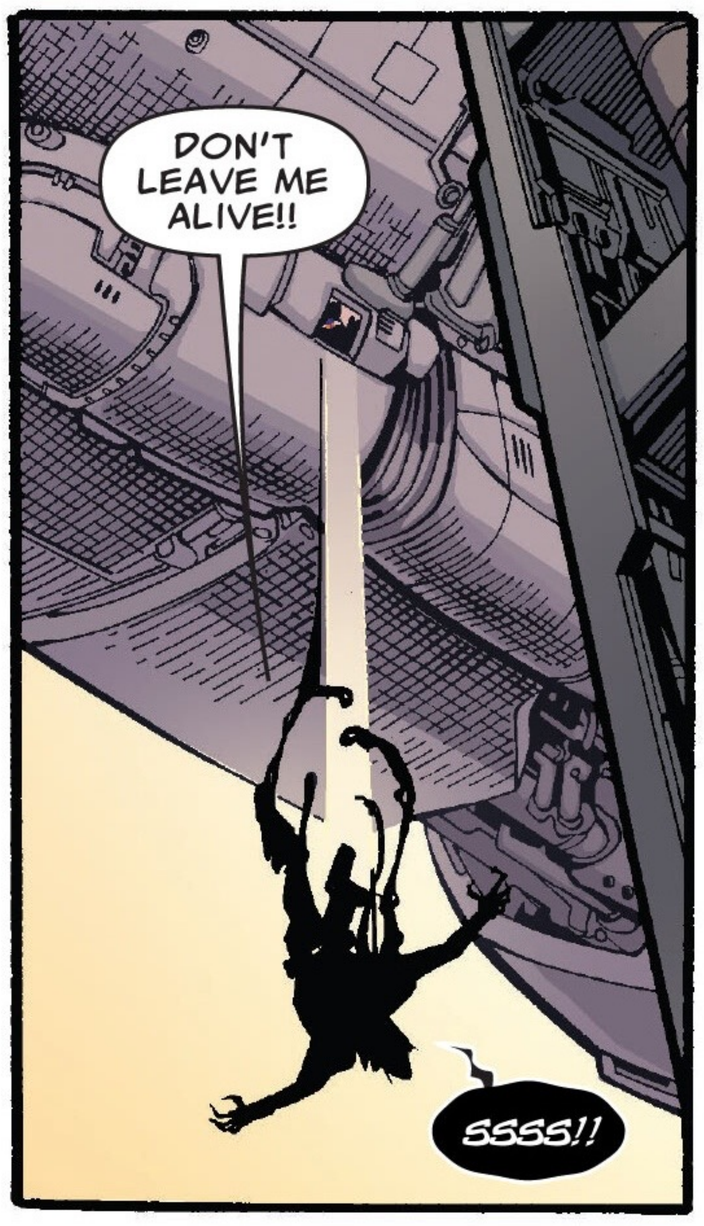
GABRIEL...
YOU. RECORDER.
OBSERVATION: THIS UNIT IS IN JEOPARDY.
OH, I'M NOT GOING TO DESTROY YOU...I NEED YOU TO DELIVER A MESSAGE.
GO BACK AND TELL THE COUNCIL THAT IT IS OFFICIALLY DISSOLVED.
ANY INTERFERENCE OR RESISTANCE TO SHI'AR ACTION WILL BE MET WITH SIMILAR...


"...CLARITY."


HAHAHAHAHAHAHAA!!!

KORVUS! KORVUS!!
RECANT!!
OH, ZZZXX!! HAVE TO GO NOW, ANIMAL, OR ELSE WE BURN!


NO!! PLEASE!!
--TRULY FASCINATING SPECIMEN--
JUST GET IT OUT OF HERE! WE HAVE TO GO!


DON'T LEAVE ME ALIVE!!
SSSS!!

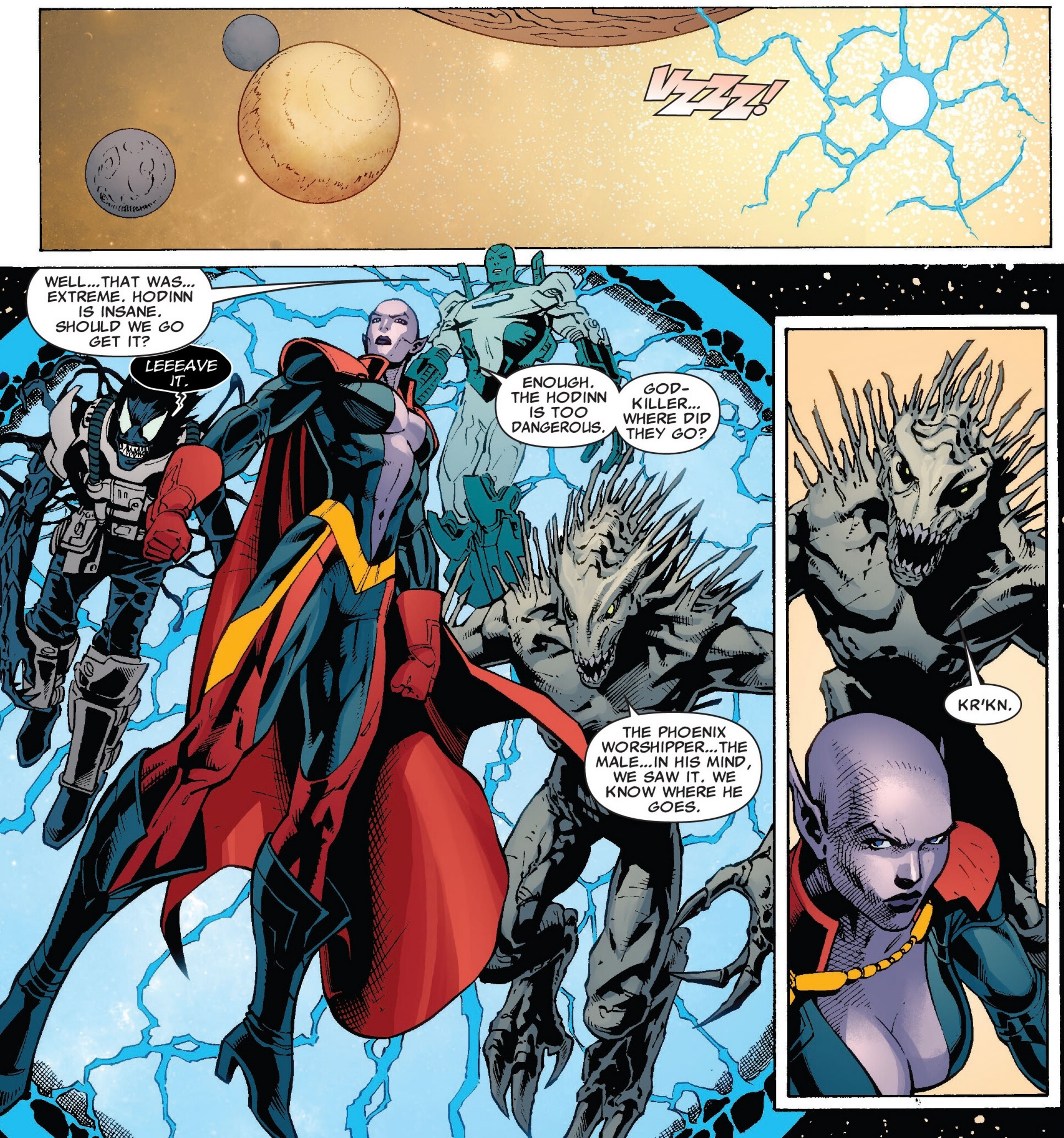
FEED ON YOU, LILANDRA NERAMANI!

"THIS ISN'T HAPPENING...PLEASE, GOD, TELL ME THIS ISN'T HAPPENING *AGAIN!*"

RACHEL...

HOW MANY *MILLIONS* OF PEOPLE JUST DIED BECAUSE WE WERE THERE? *HOW MANY?!*

KORVUS, PLEASE...PLEASE BE OKAY...I NEED YOU...I'M SORRY...I'M SO SORRY...



LORNA...
LORNA!
VULCAN!!
...WHAT? WHO--?
HI, BEAUTIFUL.
ALEX...OH, GOD, ALEX... I THOUGHT... I THOUGHT...

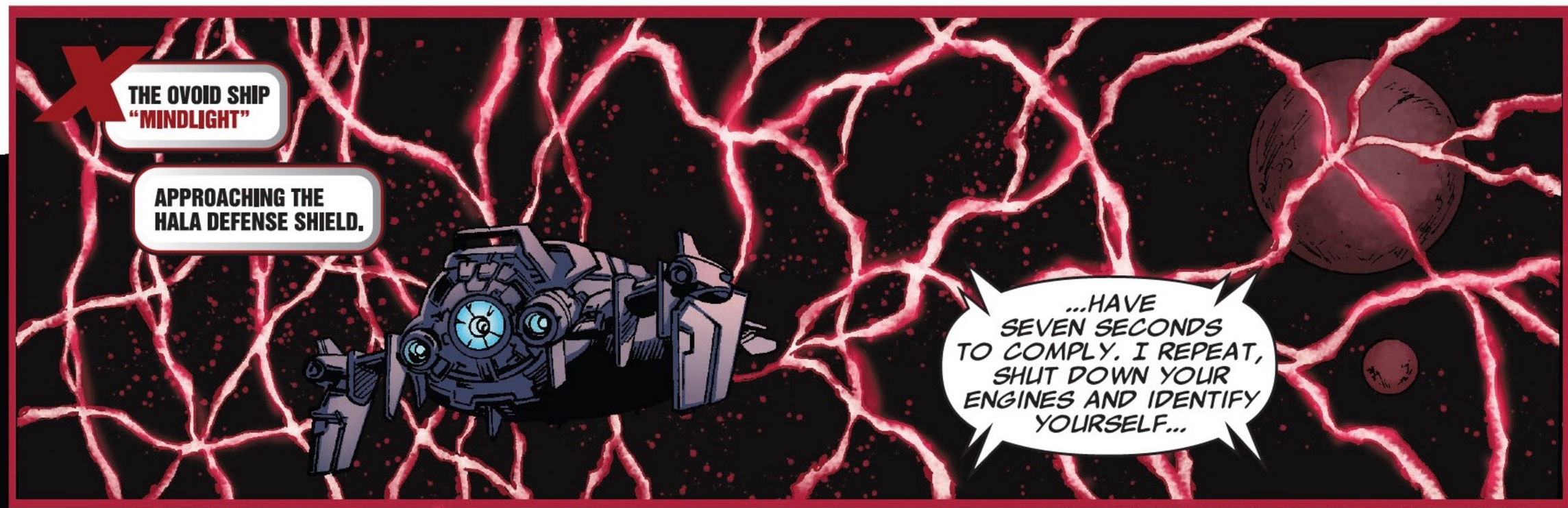
OH, NO. NO, WE'RE NOT LEAVING.

COME AGAIN?

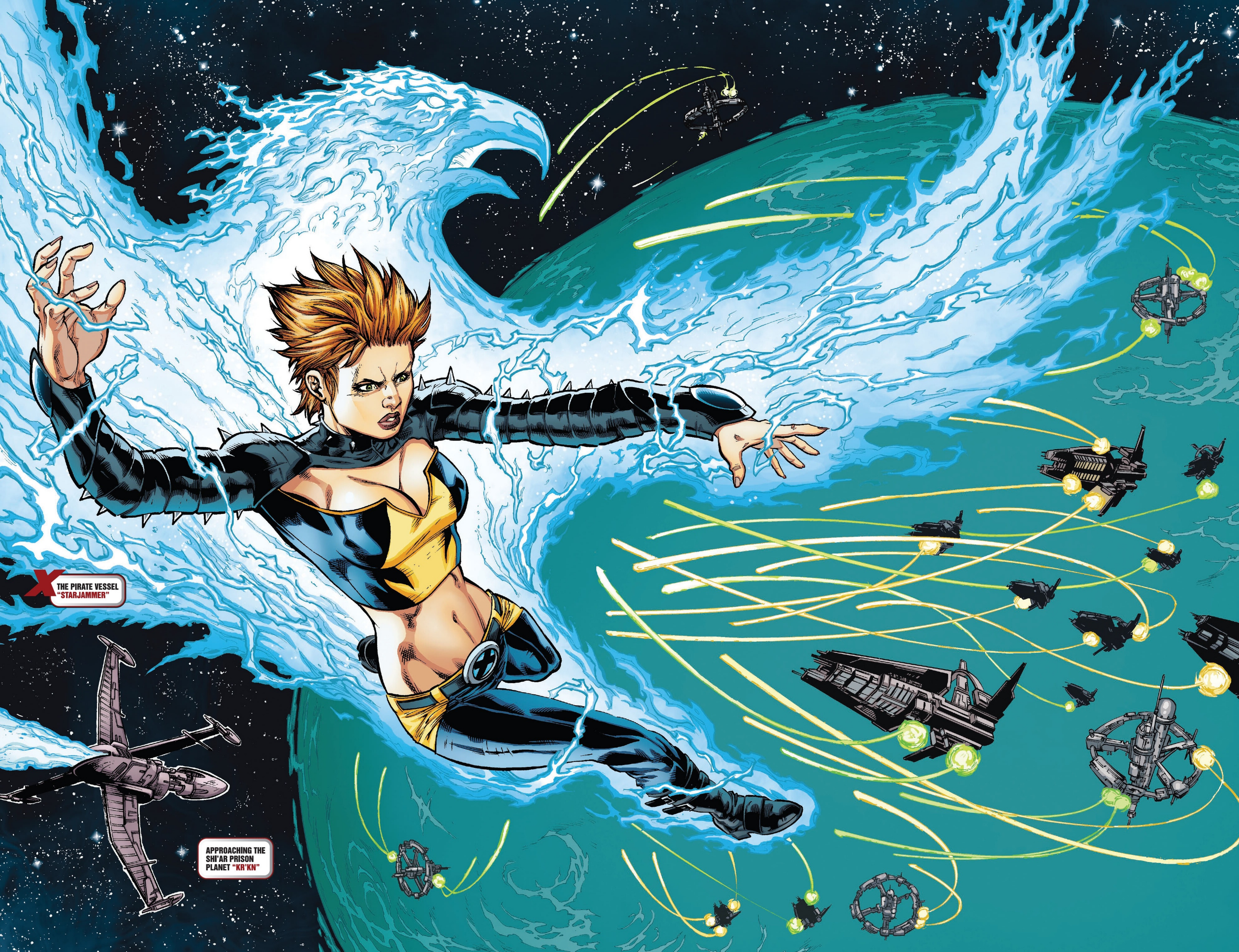
NO, GABRIEL IS GOING TO COME TO US NOW.

AND THIS IS WHERE WE'RE GOING TO *KILL* HIM.

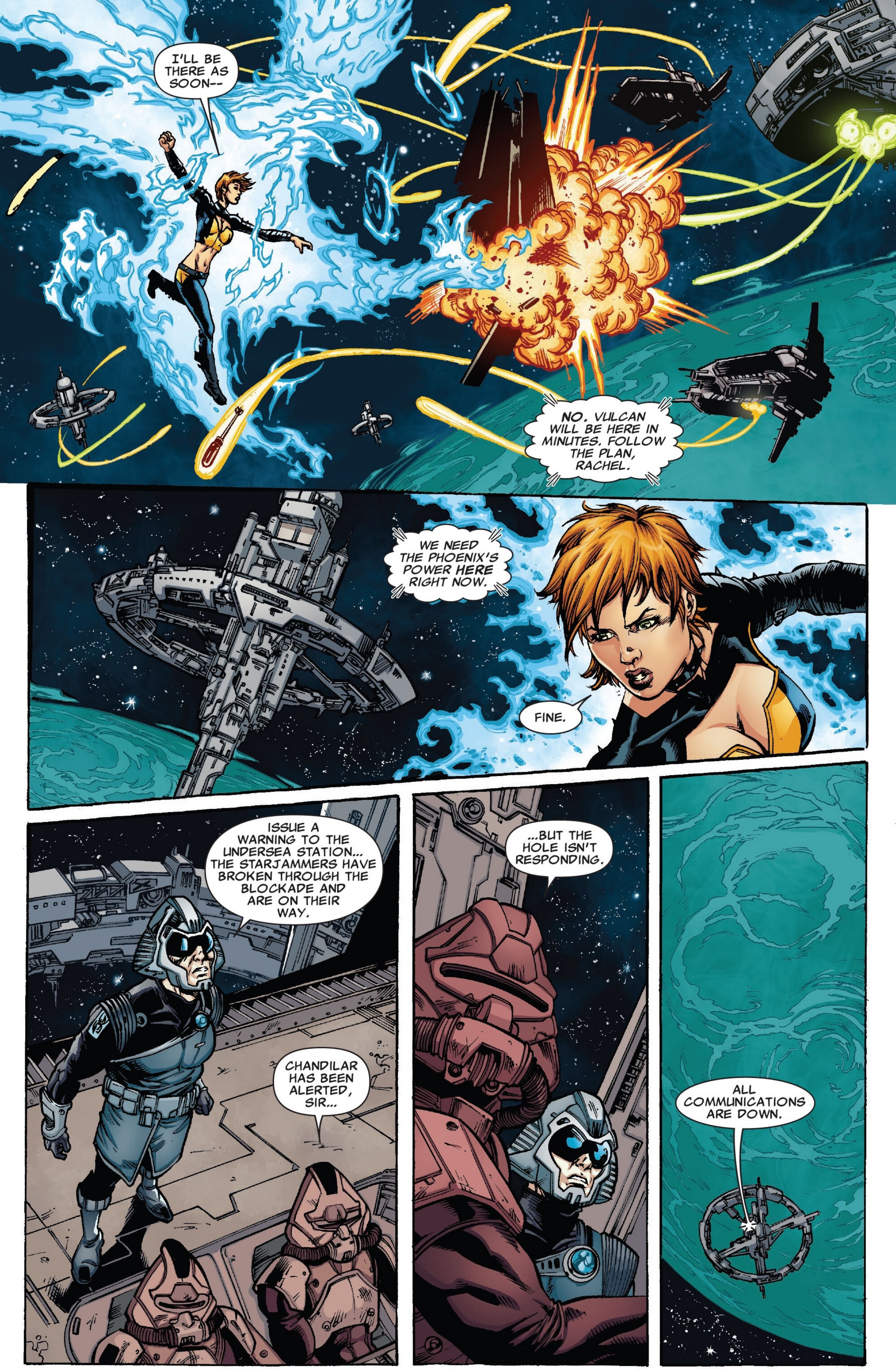
X-MEN: KINGBREAKER 3

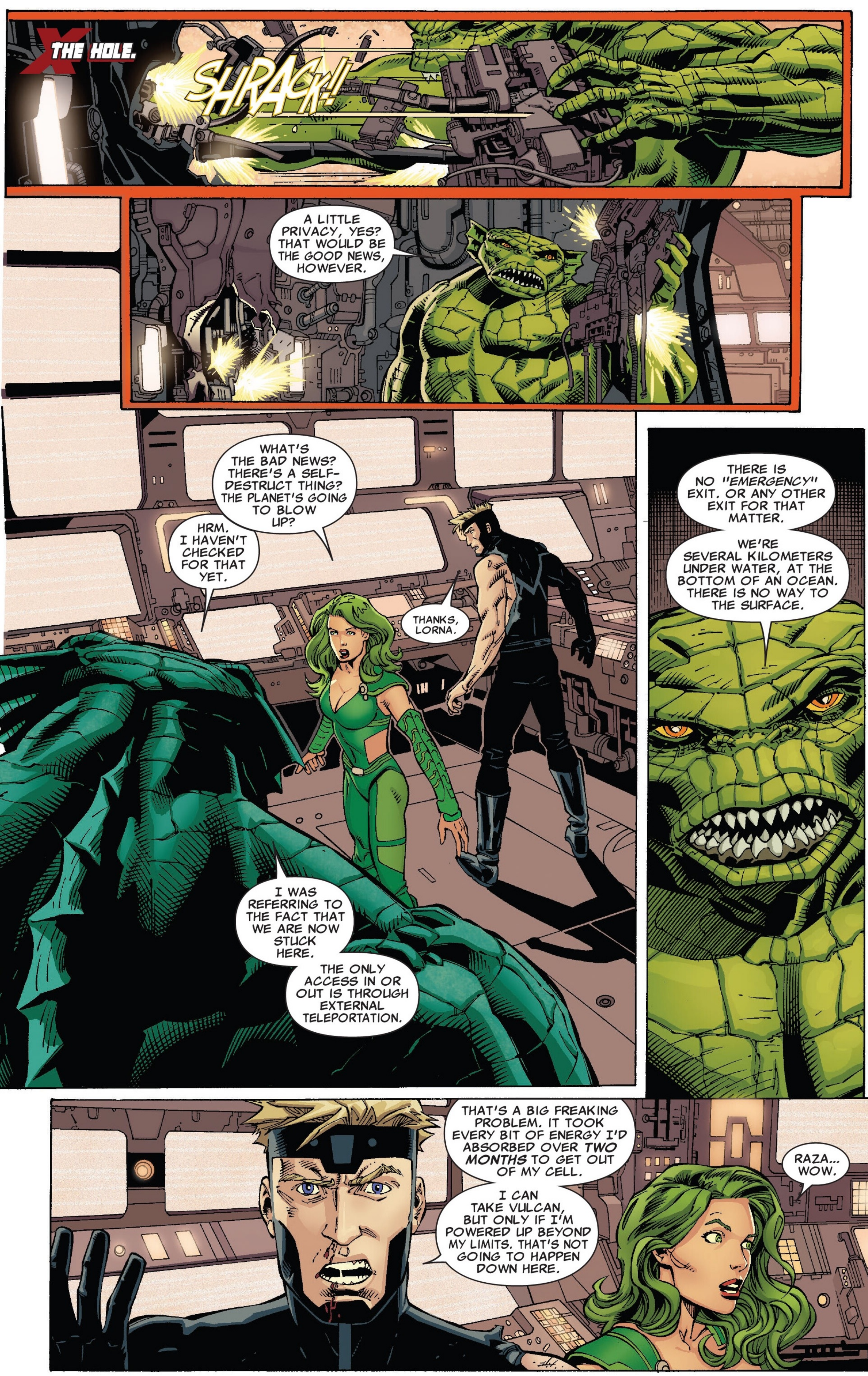

THE OVOID SHIP "MINDLIGHT"
APPROACHING THE HALA DEFENSE SHIELD.
...HAVE SEVEN SECONDS TO COMPLY. I REPEAT, SHUT DOWN YOUR ENGINES AND IDENTIFY YOURSELF...

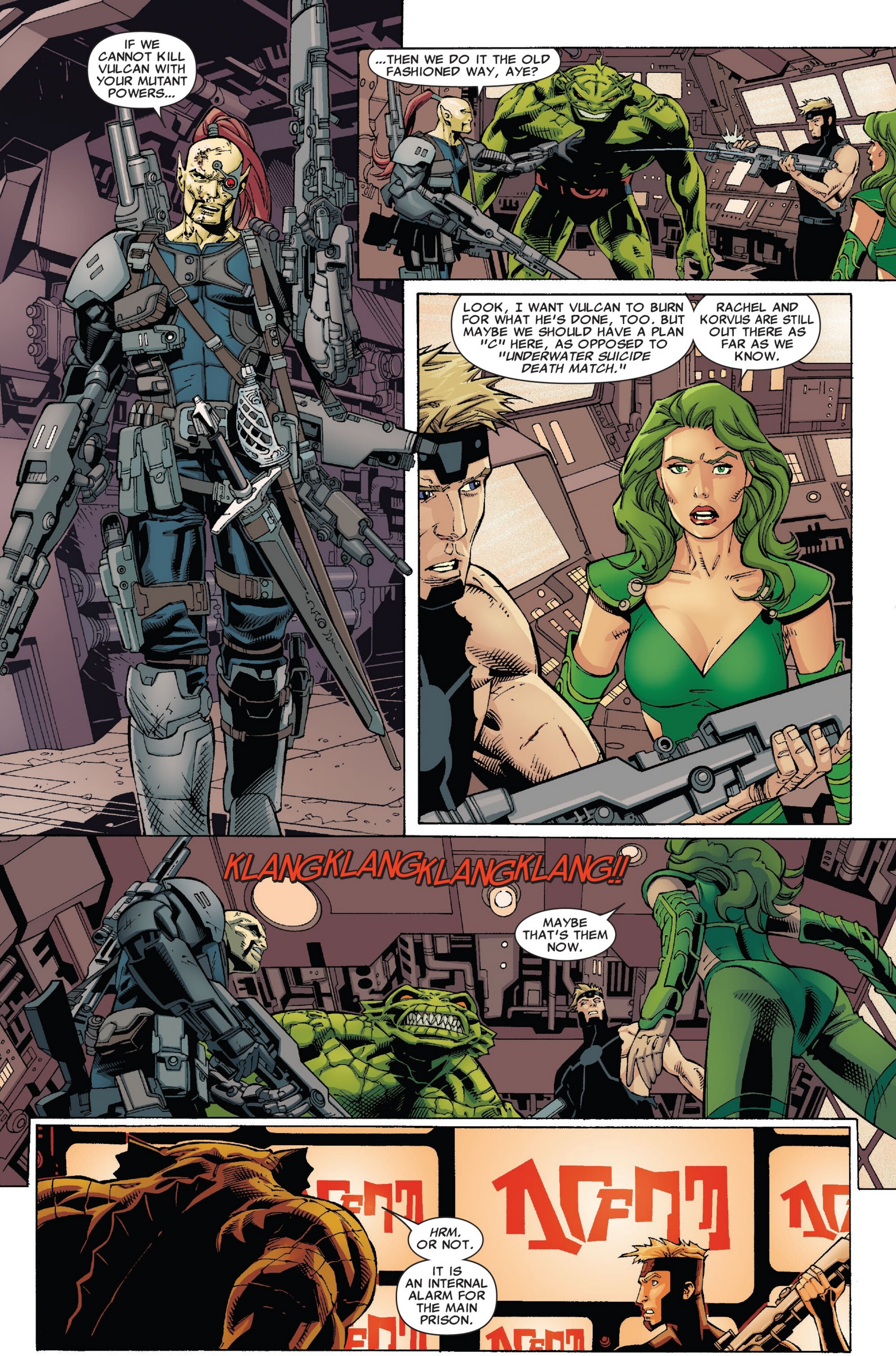
...OR YOU WILL BE DESTROYED. YOU ARE NOW IN DIRECT VIOLATION OF KREE SPACE.
STAND DOWN, OR DIE.
HAIL, KREE. THE GALACTIC COUNCIL SEEKS AN AUDIENCE WITH RONAN THE ACCUSER.
THERE IS SOMETHING HE NEEDS TO SEE.


THE PIRATE VESSEL "STARJAMMER"
APPROACHING THE SHI'AR PRISON PLANET "KR'KN"

THAT'S A LOT OF MISSILES.
TARGET THE FIRST WAVE, USE THEM AGAINST--
I KNOW WHAT TO DO.
TK! TK!
TK!
KRA-THOOOM!
YOU'RE GOOD TO GO!!
BEGINNING DESCENT...


I'LL BE THERE AS SOON--
NO. VULCAN WILL BE HERE IN MINUTES. FOLLOW THE PLAN, RACHEL.
WE NEED THE PHOENIX'S POWER HERE RIGHT NOW.
FINE.
ISSUE A WARNING TO THE UNDERSEA STATION... THE STARJAMMERS HAVE BROKEN THROUGH THE BLOCKADE AND ARE ON THEIR WAY.
CHANDILAR HAS BEEN ALERTED, SIR...
...BUT THE HOLE ISN'T RESPONDING.
ALL COMMUNICATIONS ARE DOWN.


THE HOLE.
SHRACK!!
A LITTLE PRIVACY, YES? THAT WOULD BE THE GOOD NEWS, HOWEVER.
WHAT'S THE BAD NEWS? THERE'S A SELF-DESTRUCT THING? THE PLANET'S GOING TO BLOW UP?
HRM. I HAVEN'T CHECKED FOR THAT YET.
THANKS, LORNA.
I WAS REFERRING TO THE FACT THAT WE ARE NOW STUCK HERE.
THE ONLY ACCESS IN OR OUT IS THROUGH EXTERNAL TELEPORTATION.
THERE IS NO "EMERGENCY" EXIT. OR ANY OTHER EXIT FOR THAT MATTER.
WE'RE SEVERAL KILOMETERS UNDER WATER, AT THE BOTTOM OF AN OCEAN. THERE IS NO WAY TO THE SURFACE.
THAT'S A BIG FREAKING PROBLEM. IT TOOK EVERY BIT OF ENERGY I'D ABSORBED OVER TWO MONTHS TO GET OUT OF MY CELL.
I CAN TAKE VULCAN, BUT ONLY IF I'M POWERED UP BEYOND MY LIMITS. THAT'S NOT GOING TO HAPPEN DOWN HERE.
RAZA... WOW.


IF WE CANNOT KILL VULCAN WITH YOUR MUTANT POWERS...
...THEN WE DO IT THE OLD FASHIONED WAY, AYE?
LOOK, I WANT VULCAN TO BURN FOR WHAT HE'S DONE, TOO. BUT MAYBE WE SHOULD HAVE A PLAN "C" HERE, AS OPPOSED TO "UNDERWATER SUICIDE DEATH MATCH."
RACHEL AND KORVUS ARE STILL OUT THERE AS FAR AS WE KNOW.
KLANGKLANGKLANGKLANG!!
MAYBE THAT'S THEM NOW.
HRM. OR NOT.
IT IS AN INTERNAL ALARM FOR THE MAIN PRISON.

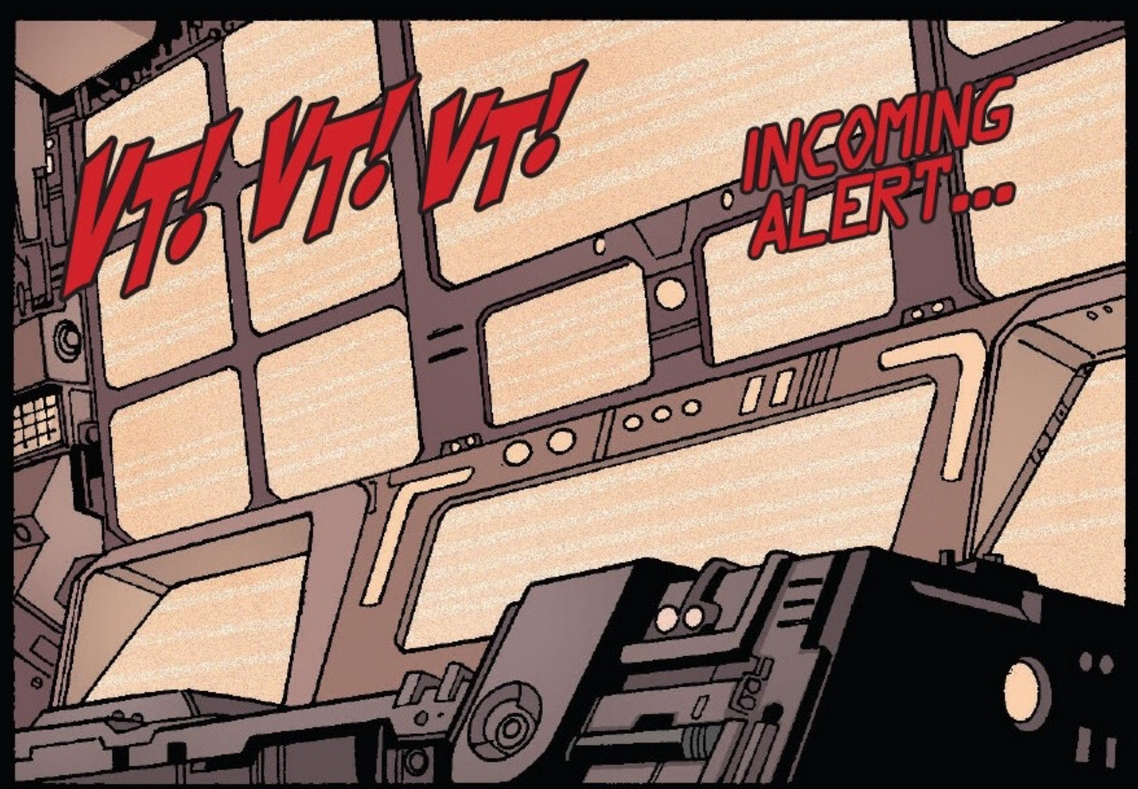
"IT WOULD APPEAR THE DAMAGE WE'VE DONE IN GETTING HERE HAS SHORTED OUT ALL THE PRISON SYSTEMS.
"THE CELLS ARE ALL OPENING.
"THE PRISON POPULATION OUTNUMBERS THE GUARDS POSTED HERE TEN-TO-ONE."
SUGGEST YOU HUMANS GET A BIGGER ALPHABET IF YOU INSIST ON LABELING YOUR BACKUP PLANS.
THE SHI'AR GUARDS ARE GOING TO BE SLAUGHTERED. AND THEN, YOU KNOW...US.
NO LESS THAN THEY DESERVE, DANE. YE MAY REMEMBER, THESE ARE THE SCUM WHO TORTURED US.
VULCAN IS ONE THING...
...BUT IS THIS WHO WE ARE NOW, ALEX? ARE WE JUST GOING TO LET THEM DIE?

CHANDILAR.
THRONE WORLD OF THE SHI'AR EMPIRE.
WE HAVE... CONCERNS, EMPEROR.
REALLY.
YOUR EXECUTION OF THE GALACTIC COUNCIL ENVOY...
...IT COULD CAUSE PROBLEMS.
EXPANSION IS ONE THING, MY LOVE. WAGING WAR AGAINST THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE IS ANOTHER.
I DISAGREE.
YOU THINK I DON'T LISTEN AT ALL THESE BRIEFINGS, BUT I DO. AFTER THE ANNIHILATION WAVE AND THE PHALANX ATTACK ON THE KREE...THE SHI'AR ARE THE ONLY POWER LEFT IN THE UNIVERSE.
AND NOW WORD COMES FROM OUR SPIES ON HALA.
RONAN HAS SURRENDERED. THE KREE HAVE A NEW KING.

THE INHUMANS? THEY ARE BUT GENETIC SCIENCE EXPERIMENTS...
WELL, WHATEVER THEY ARE, THEY'RE IN CHARGE NOW. ONE OF THEM IS EVEN MARRYING RONAN TO SOLIDIFY POWER.
THINK WE'LL BE INVITED TO THE WEDDING?
REPORT, ORACLE.
AS YOU REQUESTED, THE IMPERIAL GUARD IS ASSEMBLED AND READY. BUT THERE IS NEWS FROM THE CLENCH.
THE CLENCH WORLDS, MY EMPEROR...THEY'VE BEEN DESTROYED. ALL OF THEM. BY THE HODINN.
I WANT CONFIRMATION THAT THE STARJAMMERS ARE DEAD. I WANT BODIES TO DISPLAY.
MY EMPEROR, FORGIVE ME...IT IS NOT POSSIBLE A HODINN IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS.
G-TYPE IS DEAD, THERE ARE NO OTHER HODINN IN THIS GALAXY. THEY WERE HUNTED DOWN.
THE HODINN...
I WANT BODIES.
IF THE STARJAMMERS ESCAPED, I WANT TO KNOW WHERE THEY ARE. MAKE CONTACT WITH...HER.
MY LOVE...THERE IS NEWS.
FROM KR'KN.

THE CLENCH WORLDS.
BY SHARRA AND KY'THRI...
WE HAVE TO KILL IT. FOR ALL OUR SAKES.
OUR ORDERS COME FROM THE EMPEROR, SIR...
...WE HAVE TO PICK IT UP. EMPEROR VULCAN WANTS IT BACK.
MORE.

THE HOLE.
AAAIEEE!!
NO... NO!! STAY BACK!!
NYEEAAARGH!!
VMMM!!
HNN!
SHRUNK!!
LIK!
BACK OFF. EVERYONE.
NOW.
DO YOUR BEST TO KEEP EVERYONE ALIVE, STARJAMMERS... STARTING WITH US.
STAY TOGETHER, DON'T LET THEM SEPARATE YOU.
SAVE WHO YOU CAN.
HERE IT COMES.


VT! VT! VT!
INCOMING ALERT...

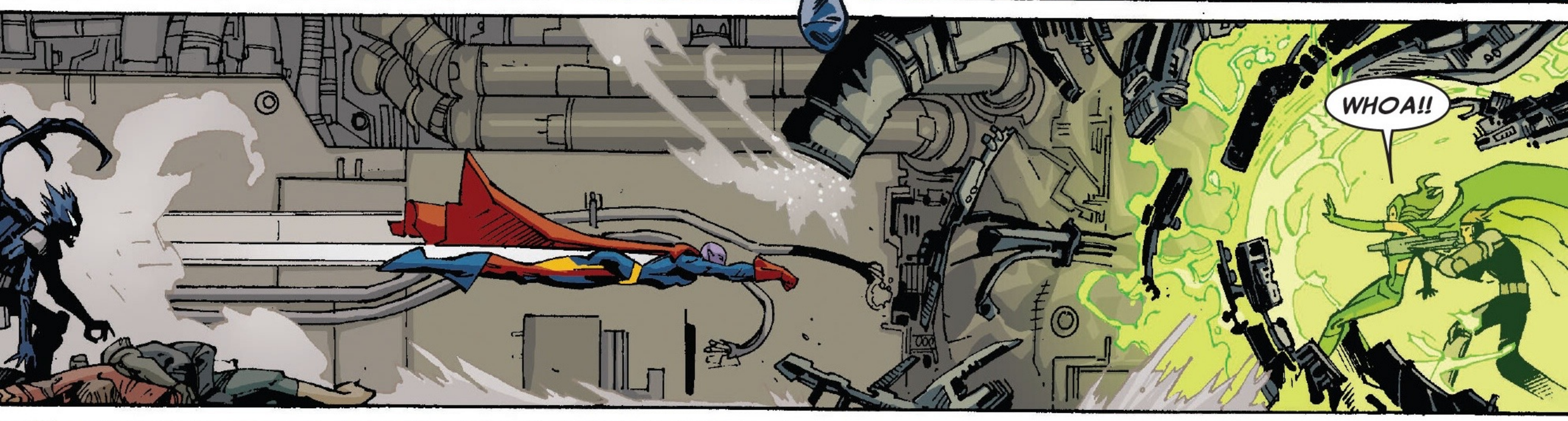
INCOMING TELEPORTATION DETECTED... TWO SIGNALS.
WARP GATE OPENING IN ORBIT.
MULTIPLE TELEPORTATION SIGNALS DETECTED WITHIN FACILITY.

WE HAVE TELEPORTATION LOCK.
I CAN'T GET A TP READING INSIDE THE PRISON... SOMETHING'S BLOCKING ME.
I'M COMING DOWN THERE.
NO! WHATEVER WE FIND INSIDE...
...WE'LL HANDLE IT. HOLD THE PERIMETER.
SHMMMM!
DO YOU THINK SHE'LL LISTEN?
MOST DEFINITELY NOT. STAY WITH ME, EMPRESS. WE'LL FIND--
...THEM. NEVERMIND.
BY THE GODS...

HAVOK... WE...
WE ARE HERE TO RESCUE YOU.

LILANDRA! KORVUS! YOU'RE ALIVE! WHERE...WHERE'S RACHEL?
SHE IS GUARDING OUR EXIT IN ORBIT. YOU SEEM...WELL, LORNA.
THEY DRUGGED ME.
AH.
WE NEED TO LEAVE RIGHT NOW.
THAT IS WHAT I SUGGESTED, YES? LEAVING IS GOOD. HAVOK DISAGREES.
THIS IS OUR BEST SHOT AT VULCAN. HE'S BEEN VISITING ME...TRYING TO BREAK ME. HE'LL COME FOR ME AGAIN, AND THIS TIME WE'LL BE WAITING.
I'LL RECHARGE ON THE STARJAMMER, BUT THIS IS WHERE WE MAKE OUR STAND.
VULCAN WILL COME FOR YOU, HAVOK, BUT IT WILL NOT BE HIM ALONE.
YOU WERE FOLLOWED?
TO SAY THE LEAST. I UNDERSTAND YOUR NEED FOR VENGEANCE, BUT IF WE STAY, WE WILL ALL DIE HERE.
RACHEL'S POWER IS THE ONLY THING THAT'S KEPT US ALIVE THIS LONG.
IF VULCAN BRINGS DOWN THE FULL MIGHT OF THE EMPIRE--
WHAT THE HELL IS--
ZZZXXX!!
EVERYONE MOVE!!

ZZZZM!!!
KILL THEM ALL.


WHOA!!

WHAM!!
LORNA!!
UHN!!

NEW FACES. HOW DELIGHTFUL.

COME ON...COME ON... COME--
FWASH!!
OH, SH--
CHOOM!
UHHNN!

YOUR SWORD IS YOUR GOD, CARVE OUT YOUR HEART WITH IT...BREAK THE SWORD, KILL THE PHOENIX...
...GET OUT OF MY...MIND... ANIMAL...
CH'OD!!
HHNN!! VULCAN RECRUITING, I SEE...
YOU NEED TO ALL DIE SO I CAN GET PAID. THE SWORD IS HERE...WHERE IS THE FIRE GIRL?
SHRAA!!
AAAH!!
HANG ON, I'VE GOT--
IT WANTS...
IT WANTS YOUR BRAIN...
WATCH YOUR SIDE, ALEX!!
SKEEEEE!!
SHRIPP!

--GOING TO TEAR YOU APART, GREEN HAIR!
YOU'RE IN MY WAY!!
UHNN!
WHAT... WHAT ARE YOU?!
THE LAST THING YOU'LL EVER SEE.
OH, GOD. YOU'RE LIKE HIM...LIKE GLADIATOR. KALLARK...WE THOUGHT THERE WAS ONLY ONE...
ZARK!!
SHRIPP!!
YOU THOUGHT WRONG!

DIE, MONSTER!
SKKEEEEE!!
URKK!
...THANK... YOU...
KKIIIIII!!
AAAAAHHHHH!!
NO... NO!!
RAZA!!
FWASH!!

NO MORE GAMES, ALEX. NO MORE TIME OUTS. NOW...

...YOU ALL DIE.

War of Kings #5 variant by ADI GRANOV

X-MEN: KINGBREAKER 4

"SHOW ME."
"PLAYBACK: RECORDER SESSION FILE #24945"
SHRAAGH!

YOU. RECORDER.
OBSERVATION: THIS UNIT IS IN JEOPARDY.
OH, I'M NOT GOING TO DESTROY YOU...I NEED YOU TO DELIVER A MESSAGE. GO BACK AND TELL THE COUNCIL THAT IT IS OFFICIALLY DISSOLVED.

ANY INTERFERENCE OR RESISTANCE TO SHI'AR ACTION WILL BE MET WITH SIMILAR... CLARITY.

MY NAME IS VULCAN. BUT SOON YOU WILL ALL CALL ME "KING."

HALA, THE KREE EMPIRE.
THE WAR ROOM OF RONAN THE ACCUSER.
END OF FILE.
PLAY IT AGAIN, RECORDER.

THE SHI'AR PRISON PLANET "KR'KN"
BURN.
THE EMPEROR'S SHIP "HAMMER II"
ALL SHIPS, TARGET THE PHOENIX AND OPEN FIRE!
CHOOM! CHOOM! CHOOM!
AAAHH!
HA HA HA HA HA!

THE HOLE
BRING ME MY BROTHER'S HEAD.

SHOOM!
UHN!!
KALLARK, NO!!
I TAKE NO PLEASURE IN THIS, X-MAN.
HNN... DON'T HAVE TO DO... THIS...
YOU'RE WRONG.
HE'S NOT YOUR... EMPEROR...
DO IT, KALLARK.
KILL HIM. AND THEN I CAN KILL YOU, COUSIN.
XENITH...
EMPEROR... WHAT IS... SHE...
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
RRRRAAAA!!
THOOM!!

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?!
KILL THEM ALL!!
CH'OD... CAN HEAR IT INSIDE ME...
FIGHT IT, RAZA!
CAN'T... STOP...IT'S SO HUNGRY...
WHY DO YOU KEEP FIGHTING? I'VE WON...OVER AND OVER I WIN, AND YOU KEEP FIGHTING ME. WE COULD HAVE RULED TOGETHER, BUT YOU KEEP FIGHTING ME!!
GUARD! EXECUTE LILANDRA.
SHRAK!
NO!

LILANDRA!
KRRRRRRRR!
I TOLD YOU BEFORE, GABRIEL...I'LL NEVER STOP. NONE OF US WILL.
LORNA.
I'M AWAKE NOW, GABRIEL. I MADE YOU SCREAM BEFORE, AND I CAN DO IT AGAIN.
SO BRING IT, YOU SNOT-NOSED PUNK.
RRRRRAAAAA--

KRA-THOOOM!!

LORNA! THE CEILING!!

ARRGHH!!!

HHHAAAA... BURN.

GODS SAVE US. THIS IS NOT HAPPENING.

A HODINN...?

LET'S... LET'S TRY THAT AGAIN, BUB.

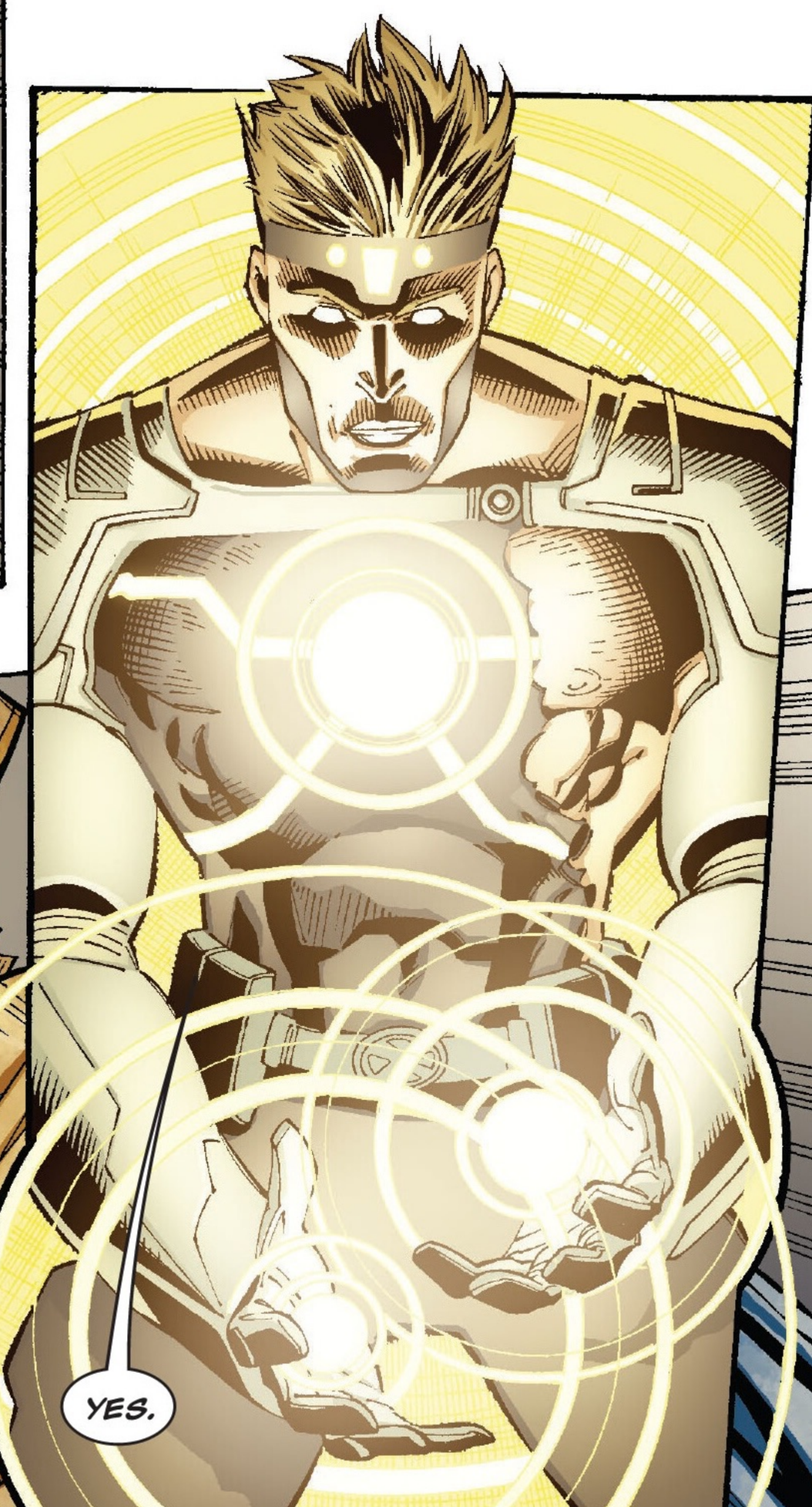
IT'S A STAR.

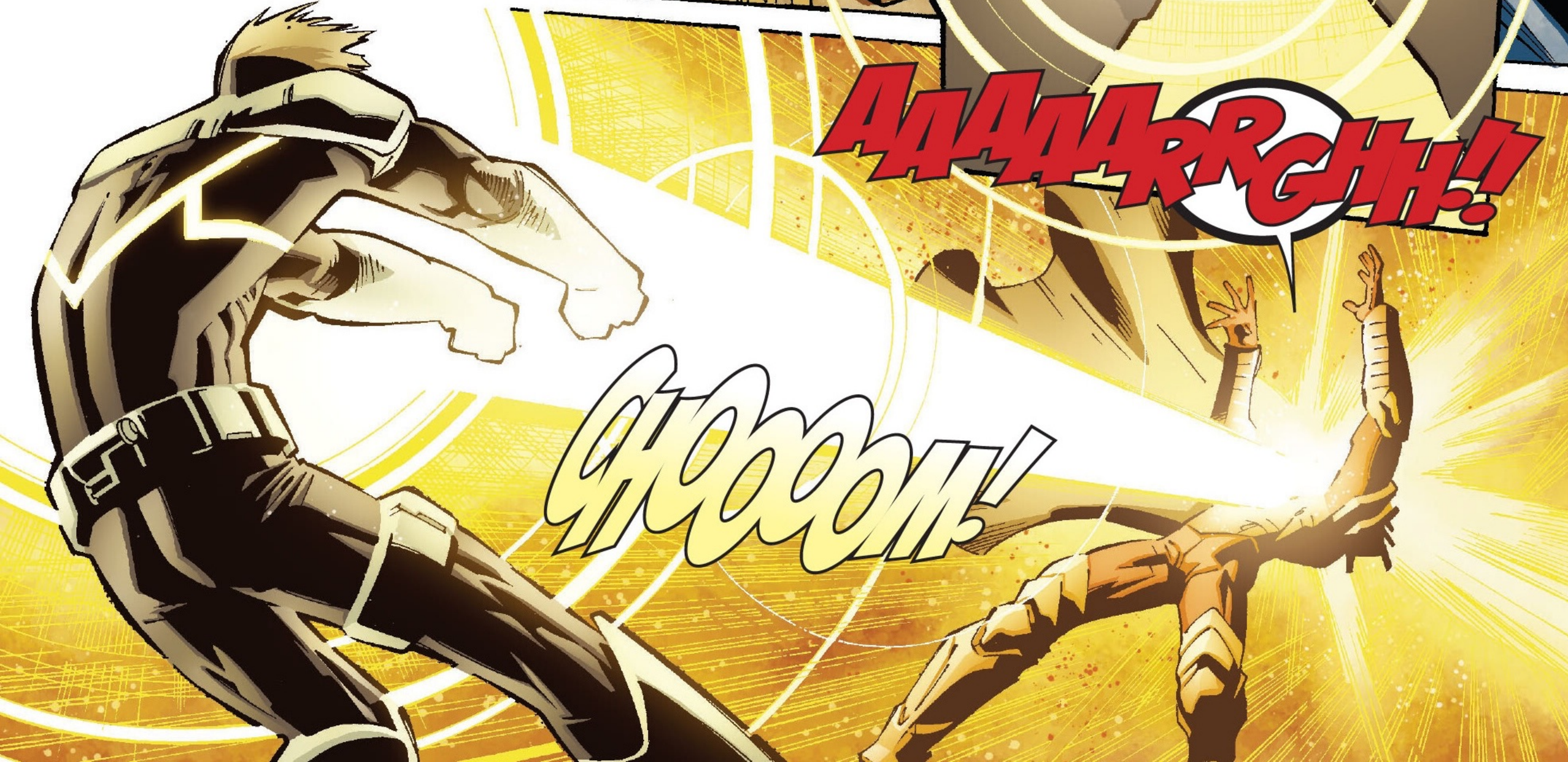
I CAN FEEL IT.

AAAIEEEE!!

KILL IT!!
AAAHHHH!

WHAT THE HELL IS HAP--
NO.


YES.


AAAAARRGHH!!
GOOOM!

GET UP, GABRIEL.
WE'RE NOT DONE.
MOVE, STARJAMMERS!!

DIE!!

HURRRR!!

I'VE WAITED SO *LONG*, ROTTING AWAY IN THE AVIANS' PRISON...YOU *DESERVE* THIS, KALLARK...

YOU FOUGHT AGAINST THE EMPIRE, WHAT WAS I SUPPOSED TO DO? YOU'RE SICK, COUSIN...YOU'RE *MAD*. YOU NEED *HELP*.

YOU CHOSE THEM OVER ME! YOU BETRAYED ME, AND YOU WILL PAY. I'M GOING TO TAKE EVERYTHING FROM YOU, "GLADIATOR."

IF THE EMPEROR KNEW, HE WOULD NEVER--

GLADIATOR!!

LISTEN TO YOUR EMPRESS.

VULCAN FREED HER. HE PARDONED HER.

SHE SERVES THE EMPIRE ONCE AGAIN, JUST AS YOU DO. IF YOU CLAIM TO SERVE THE THRONE, THEN SERVE *VULCAN*...

...AND LET HER *GO*.

YOU SEE, COUSIN? YOUR EMPEROR FAVORS ME, "MAD" OR NOT. AND ONCE HIS ENEMIES ARE CRUSHED...THEN YOU AND I WILL FINISH THIS.

YOU DESERVE THIS, GABRIEL!!
WE WOULD HAVE HELPED YOU! WE WOULD HAVE WELCOMED YOU BACK!!
BUT YOU KILLED OUR FATHER!!
...CAN'T HOLD IT... WHOLE... OCEAN...
RACHEL... A LITTLE HELP...
NO! THEY DESERVED IT! CORSAIR, D'KEN... IF YOU KNEW... WHAT IT WAS LIKE...
HANG ON, LORNA!!
GO, MY LOVE...I WILL COVER--
HN!
RACHEL? WHAT IS--
OH, GOD. OH, GOD, NO...

AAAAAAHHH!!!
RACHEL!!!
WHAT JUST HAPPENED?!
THE PHOENIX FORCE...I COULD FEEL IT...
...PLEASE... NOT NOW...
...MOM...
THE BLADE... IT IS HEAVY... I CANNOT... RACHEL, WHAT--

AAAIEEE!!
SHLUK!!
NO!
BIRDIE'S NOT A BIRDIE. EASIER TO KILL. GET MY MONEY.
RRRAAAA!!!
HT.
SHRACK!!!
I DON'T NEED THE PHOENIX TO KILL ANY OF YOU.
NOW, WHO IS NEXT?

RACHEL!!
NNN... PHOENIX... GONE...
HAVOK! WE HAVE TO GO!!
WE HAVE TO-- AAH!!
SHLIK!
YOU ARE NOT GOING ANYWHERE, LILANDRA.
CAL'SYEE... VULCAN DOESN'T CARE ABOUT THE SHI'AR...HE ONLY WANTS REVENGE. HE IS FULL OF HATE.
AND THAT HATE WILL MAKE OUR EMPIRE STRONG. LOOK AT YOU...YOUR RULE ALMOST DESTROYED US.
DON'T DO THIS, CAL'SYEE.
YOU ARE WEAK AND PATHETIC, LILANDRA. NO EXILE...NO MORE RUNNING. THIS ENDS NOW, AND SISTER?
YOU'VE HAD THIS COMING A LONG TIME.
SHUNK!!
HRK!!

GUH... GAB--
CAL'SYEE?
FWAM!
CAL-- UUUHNNN!!
ALEX... PLEASE...
WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE...
...WASN'T... MY FAULT...THEY DESERVED...
I'M SORRY, GABRIEL. I'M SORRY FOR EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED TO YOU. BUT YOU WENT TOO FAR. FROM SOME ACTIONS, THERE'S NO COMING BACK.
I'M SORRY IT HAD TO BE THIS WAY.
...KILL YOU... ALL...
NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU TRY... ALL YOUR POWER... I'M STILL ALIVE. AND I'M GOING TO KILL YOU ALL.
VIMMME
HAVOK, THERE'S NO TIME! THE HOLE IS COLLAPSING!
STARJAMMER, INITIATE TELEPORT!!
NO! LILANDRA, NO! I CAN STILL--
WT!

THE EMPEROR HAS TELEPORTED ON BOARD THE HAMMER!
OPEN FIRE ON THE STARJAMMER!!
VMM!!
NO!! SEND ME BACK!
RAZA... THE SYSTEM DIDN'T RECOGNIZE HIM, RAZA WAS LEFT BEHIND...
I AM SORRY. I AM SO SORRY.
BUT WE MUST LIVE. FOR THE SAKE OF THE EMPIRE, WE MUST RUN.
INITIATING JUMPGATE.
KRAKOOOM!!!

"THE HEALERS ARE STILL TRYING..."
...BUT SHE HAS NOT WOKEN.
THE DAMAGE TO HER SPINAL CORD WAS TOO SEVERE. EVEN IF SHE WAKES, SHE WILL--
STOP.
EMPEROR... YOU NEED TO ISSUE ORDERS. OUR FORCES ARE STILL TRACKING THE STARJAMMERS, BUT WE HAVE SEVERAL CAMPAIGNS IN PROGRESS.
THE PEOPLE... YOUR FORCES... THEY NEED LEADERSHIP.
EMPEROR...
YOUR ENEMIES NEED KILLING, MY EMPEROR.

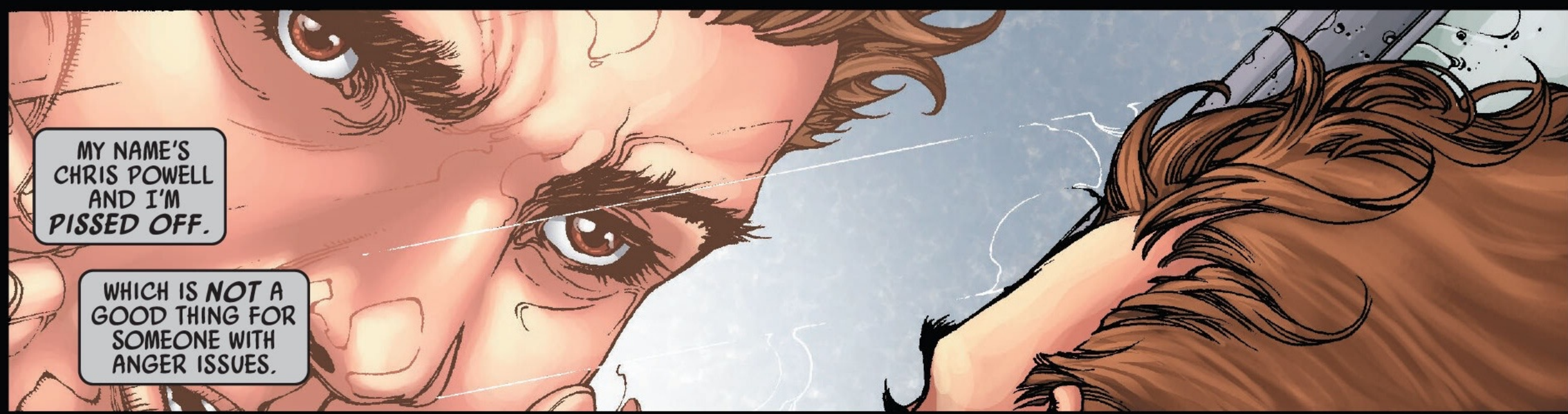
THIS IS HOW IT WILL BE. THIS IS HOW THE *EMPRESS* WOULD WANT IT.
THE STRONTIAN WILL REPLACE GLADIATOR ON THE FRONT. SHE AND KA'ARDUM WILL OVERSEE THE GREAT EXPANSION.
GLADIATOR AND THE IMPERIAL GUARD ARE WITH ME.
WE *WAIT*. YOU SEE? HAVOK AND I HAVE MORE IN COMMON THAN WE THOUGHT. HE WON'T GIVE UP, HE SAYS... BUT NEITHER WILL I.
I WILL HUNT HIM AND LILANDRA TO THE ENDS OF THE *UNIVERSE* TO MAKE THEM PAY FOR WHAT THEY'VE DONE HERE.
NOW BRING ME SOMETHING TO *KILL*.

X OUTSIDE SHI'AR SPACE
WE HAVE THIRTEEN MINUTES UNTIL THEY CAN TRACK OUR JUMP. SIX CYCLES NOW, THEY HAVE CHASED US.
SUGGEST WE COME UP WITH A PLAN, YES?
BEFORE ANY MORE OF US ARE LOST.
WE'LL GET RAZA BACK, CH'OD.
OF COURSE. BECAUSE WE WERE SO EASILY RESCUED. HRM, WAIT...NO. WE WERE TORTURED FOR MONTHS. AND NOW THE PHOENIX IS GONE.
RACHEL?
NOTHING. I CAN'T FEEL IT... I CAN'T HEAR IT...IT'S LIKE IT WAS NEVER THERE. I HAVE MY TELEPATHY AND TELEKINESIS, BUT THE POWER BEHIND IT...IT'S GONE.
YOU SHOULD HAVE LEFT ME, LILANDRA.
I COULD HAVE KILLED HIM, AND THIS WOULD BE OVER.
IS REVENGE WORTH YOUR LIFE? YOU SEE WHAT IT'S DONE TO VULCAN.
YOU'D HAVE YOUR EMPIRE BACK.
I WILL HAVE MY EMPIRE BACK, BUT I'LL DO IT ANOTHER WAY. AND I NEED YOU ALIVE.
WAR IS COMING, AND WE CAN NO LONGER FIGHT IT ALONE. WE NEED ALLIES, AND I BELIEVE I'VE FOUND THEM.
THERE IS A WEDDING WE MUST ATTEND.

KREE SPACE, OUTSIDE THE SHIFT.
REPORT.
IT APPEARED TO BE A SCOUTING PARTY, SIR.
SHI'AR WARBIRDS. THEY WERE DESTROYED UPON APPROACH.
LEAVE ME, CAPTAIN.
MY KING...

I HAVE NEWS.

WAR OF KINGS: DARKHAWK 1


MY NAME'S CHRIS POWELL AND I'M *PISSED OFF.*
WHICH IS *NOT* A GOOD THING FOR SOMEONE WITH ANGER ISSUES.

THE ALARM DIDN'T GO OFF, I OVERSLEPT AND NOW I'M GONNA BE LATE FOR WORK.
NOT THAT BIG A DEAL, I KNOW, BUT WITH ME, THINGS TEND TO ESCALATE.
Mets
The Clash
SPEED LIMIT 10

I LOSE CONTROL AND END UP HURTING THE PEOPLE I CARE ABOUT...

...THE PEOPLE I *LOVE.*

SO I DID WHAT ALL THE EXPERTS SUGGESTED AND CHANGED MY ENVIRONMENT.
CHRIS, BREAKFAST IS READY!

I'M LATE, MOM!

I DECIDED TO PUT THE PAST TO REST.

TO MAKE MY FAMILY PART OF MY LIFE AGAIN.

SO IT WAS GOOD-BYE L.A., HELLO LONG ISLAND.

BREAKFAST BEFORE WORK... THAT'S THE RULE!

TOOK YOU LONG ENOUGH! OUT LATE WITH SOME GIRL LAST NIGHT?

NAH, I BET HE WAS OUT BEATING UP THE RHINO!

NO BABES OR SUPER-VILLAINS LAST NIGHT, GUYS.

POP

PART OF THE DEAL I MADE WITH MOM WHEN I CAME BACK HOME WAS "*NO MORE SECRETS.*"

ALTHOUGH I DIDN'T MEAN TO, ALL MY SECRETS TORE THIS FAMILY APART ONCE, AND I'M NOT GOING TO LET THAT HAPPEN AGAIN.

I'D LOVE TO STAY AND CHAT BUT YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY...

...I GOTTA FLY!

AWESOME! CAN WE WATCH YOU TRANSFORM?!

YEAH, CAN WE?

IT'S A BIG STEP: TRUSTING JONATHAN AND JASON WITH THE FACT THAT I'M REALLY A SUPER HERO.

CHRIS, WAIT. TAKE A SECOND TO *BREATHE*...

...AND KISS YOUR MOTHER GOODBYE.

AWW, C'MON...

I SHOULD HAVE TOLD MOM YEARS AGO. IT COULD HAVE SAVED US SO MUCH PAIN.

WE JUST GOT YOU BACK IN OUR LIVES, BUT YOU'RE SO BUSY AT WORK, WE NEVER GET TO SPEND ANY TIME TOGETHER.

I KNOW. AND I'M SORRY. I'LL TAKE A DAY OFF SOON AND MAKE IT UP TO YOU!

PROMISE?

PROMISE. I LOVE YOU, MOM.

I LOVE YOU TOO, CHRIS. I'M SO HAPPY YOU'RE BACK.

ME TOO.

THERE'S NO USE DWELLING OVER REGRET. WE'VE PUT THE PAST BEHIND US.

WELL, SOME THINGS I'M EMPRACING...

FUWAAAASH

...LIKE THE FACT THAT YEARS AGO I FOUND A CRAZY AMULET.

A GEM THAT TRANSFORMED ME INTO A TEENAGED HERO.

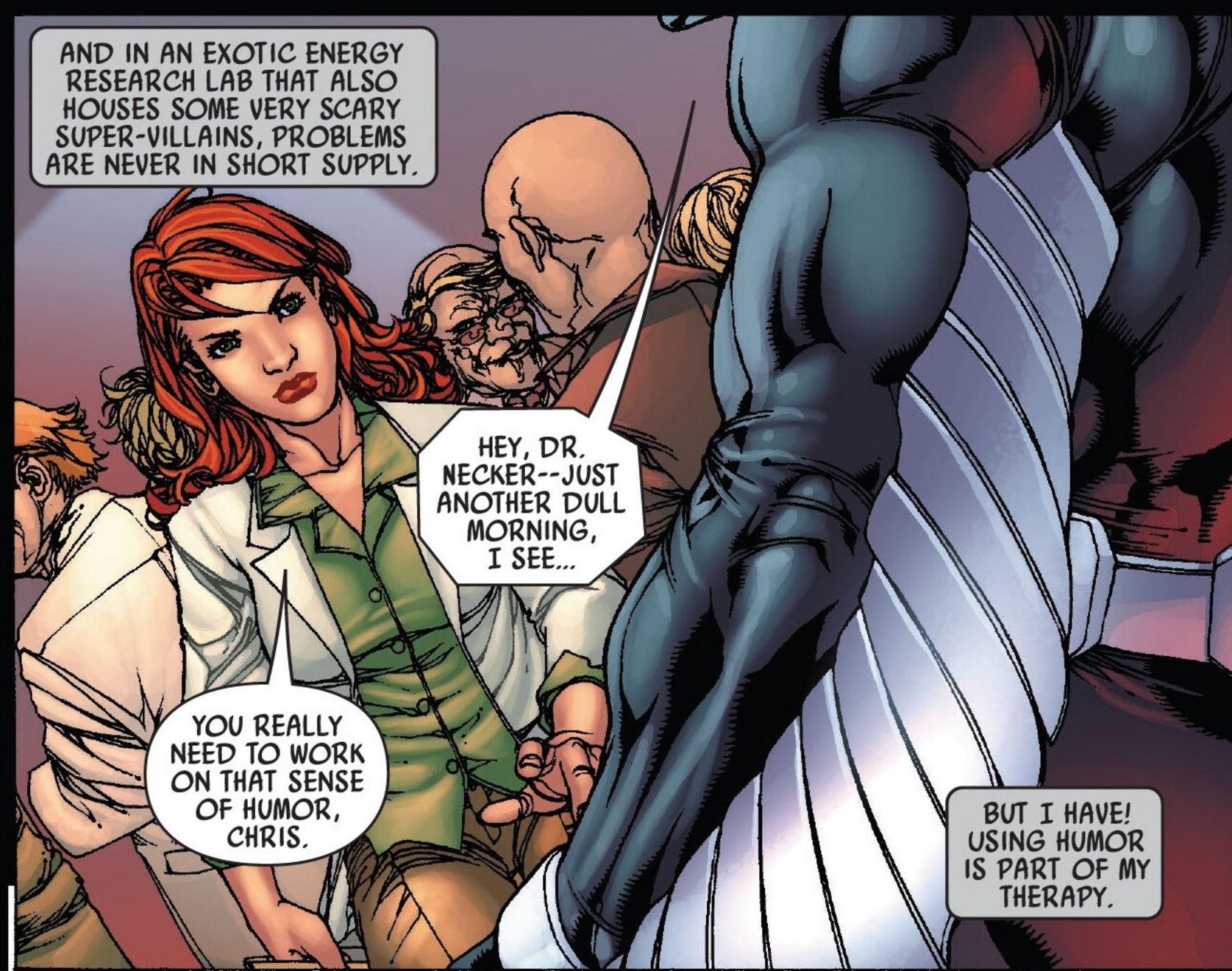
I FOUGHT ALONGSIDE THE NEW WARRIORS, SPIDER-MAN, BUT THEN I TRIED TO LEAVE ALL THE CRAZINESS BEHIND AND GROW UP.

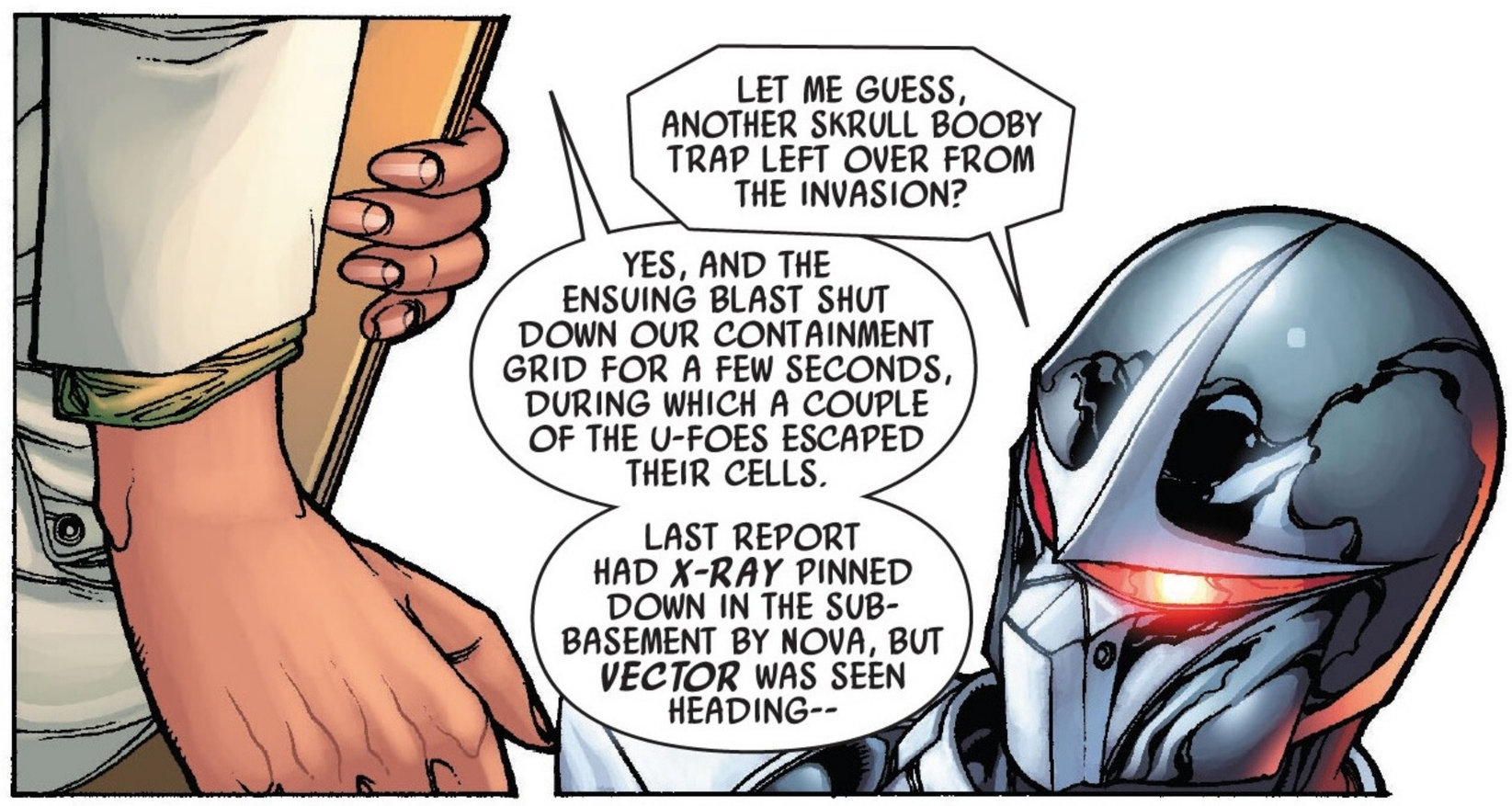
SOON ENOUGH I WAS BACK IN THE ARMOR--BUT IT TOOK OVER MY LIFE, MADE ME LASH OUT AT THOSE CLOSEST TO ME.
YEAH, I MIGHT HAVE LOST CONTROL BEFORE, BUT NOW I HAVE MY LIFE IN ORDER.
MY NAME'S CHRIS POWELL. I'M
DARKHAWK
AND ALL'S FINNALY GOOD IN MY WORLD!
HAUNTED

PROJECT: P.E.G.A.S.U.S., NEW YORK.

ANOTHER PART OF DEALING WITH MY ANGER INVOLVES ME HAVING A JOB.

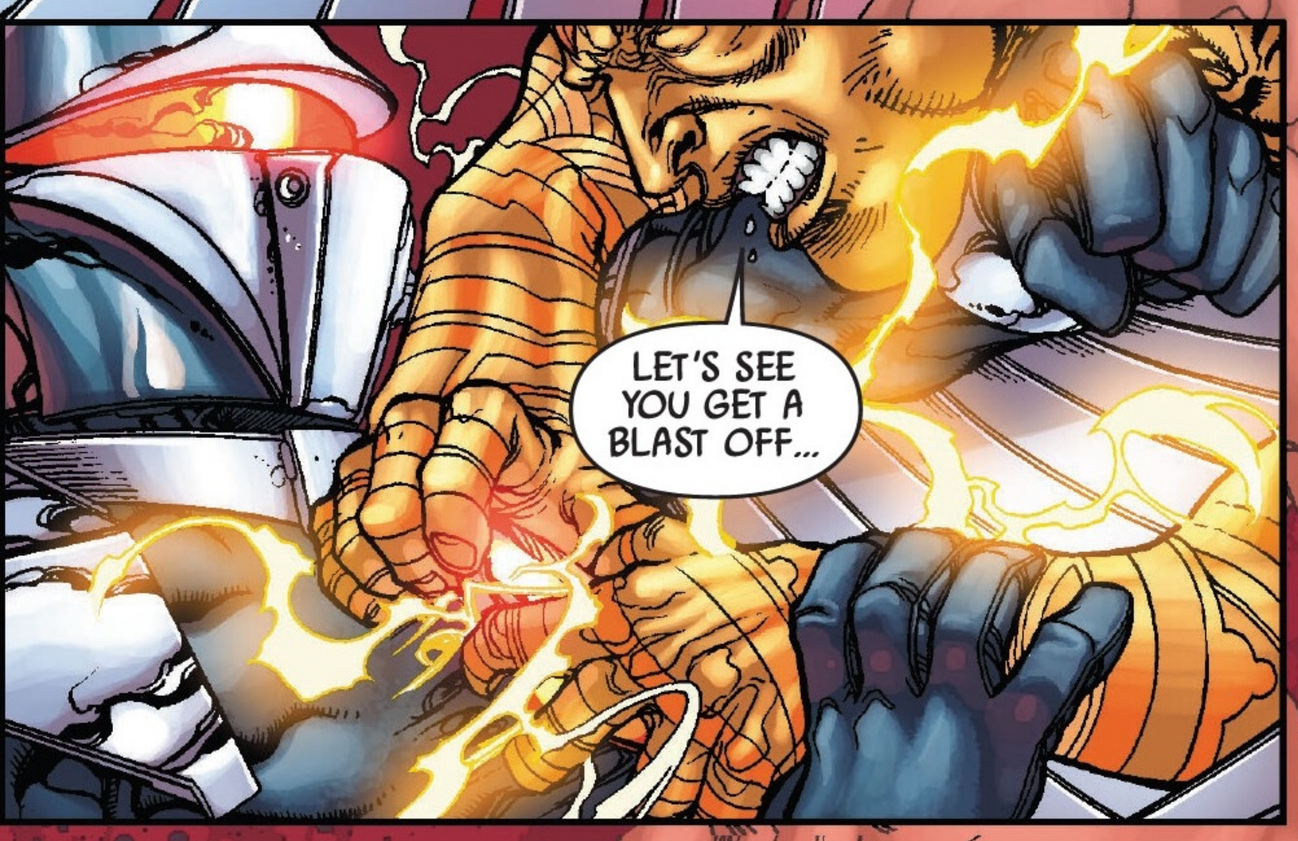
BEING SECURITY CHIEF AT P.E.G.A.S.U.S. HELPS ME FOCUS ON PROBLEMS OTHER THAN MY OWN.

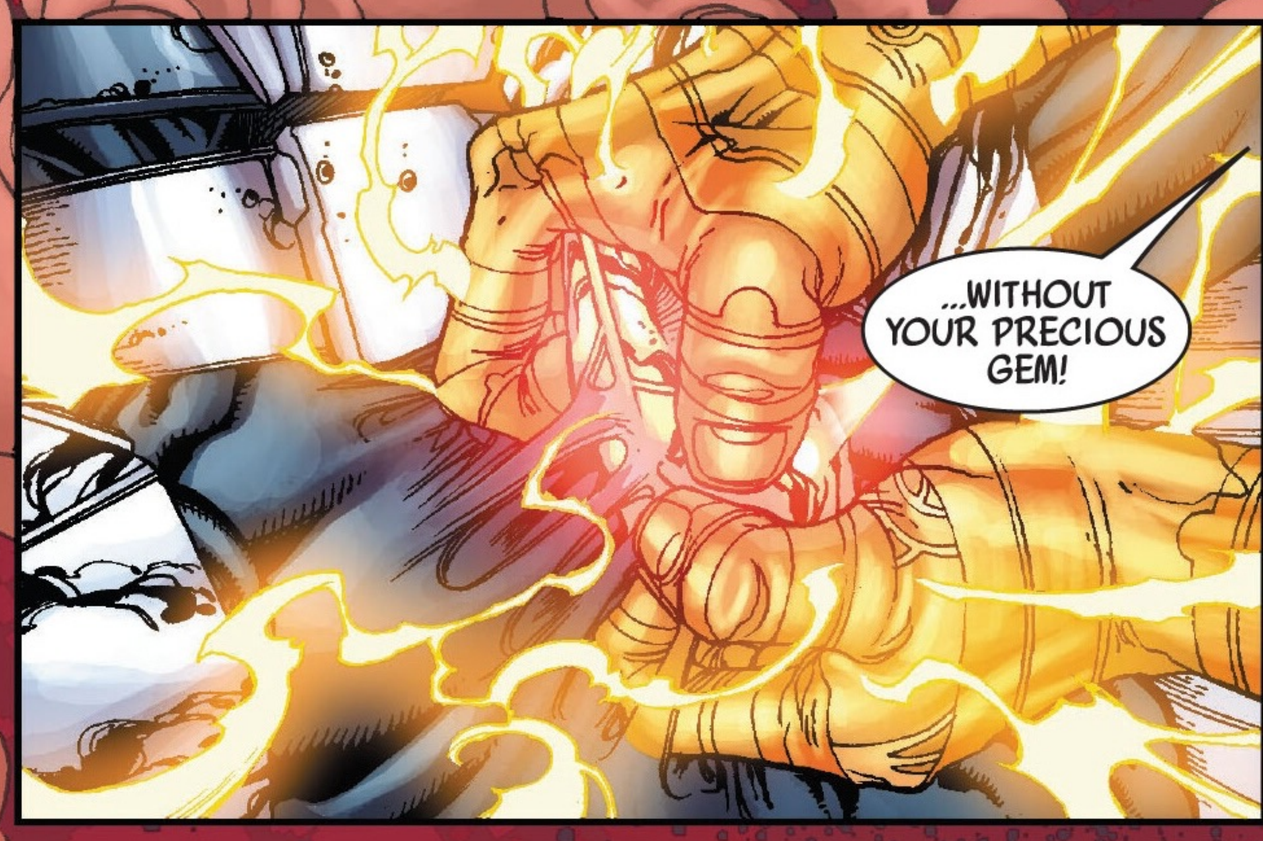




HEY, U-FOOL, TIME TO GO TO SCHOOL!
WHAM
K-TANG
SEE, THIS ARMOR DOESN'T JUST BREAK THE KNUCKLES OF THOSE STUPID ENOUGH TO PUNCH ME.
IT'S ALSO GOOD AT BURNING OFF UNFORTUNATE TATTOOS! CARE TO SAMPLE?
ZKOW
OKAY, GENIUS, INTERESTED IN TAKING THIS LESSON TO THE SKIES?
CLASS IS IN SESSION!

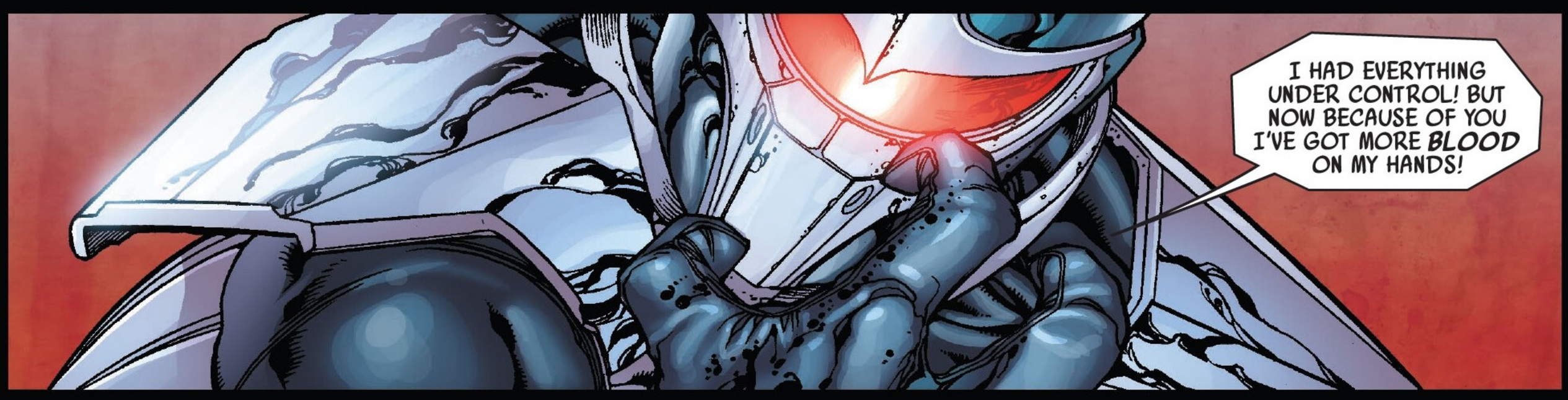
IDIOT! THIS FACILITY HAS UNDERESTIMATED ME FOR THE LAST TIME! YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW THE SOURCE OF YOUR POWER?





NOOO...
RRRAAAA!
ZHOOM
NOT...NOT AGAIN! THE AMULET... IT TOOK OVER-- WENT NUTS!

VECTOR... OH MY GOD! I DIDN'T MEAN TO...
YOU STUPID GEM! WHY ACT UP AGAIN, AFTER ALL THIS TIME?!

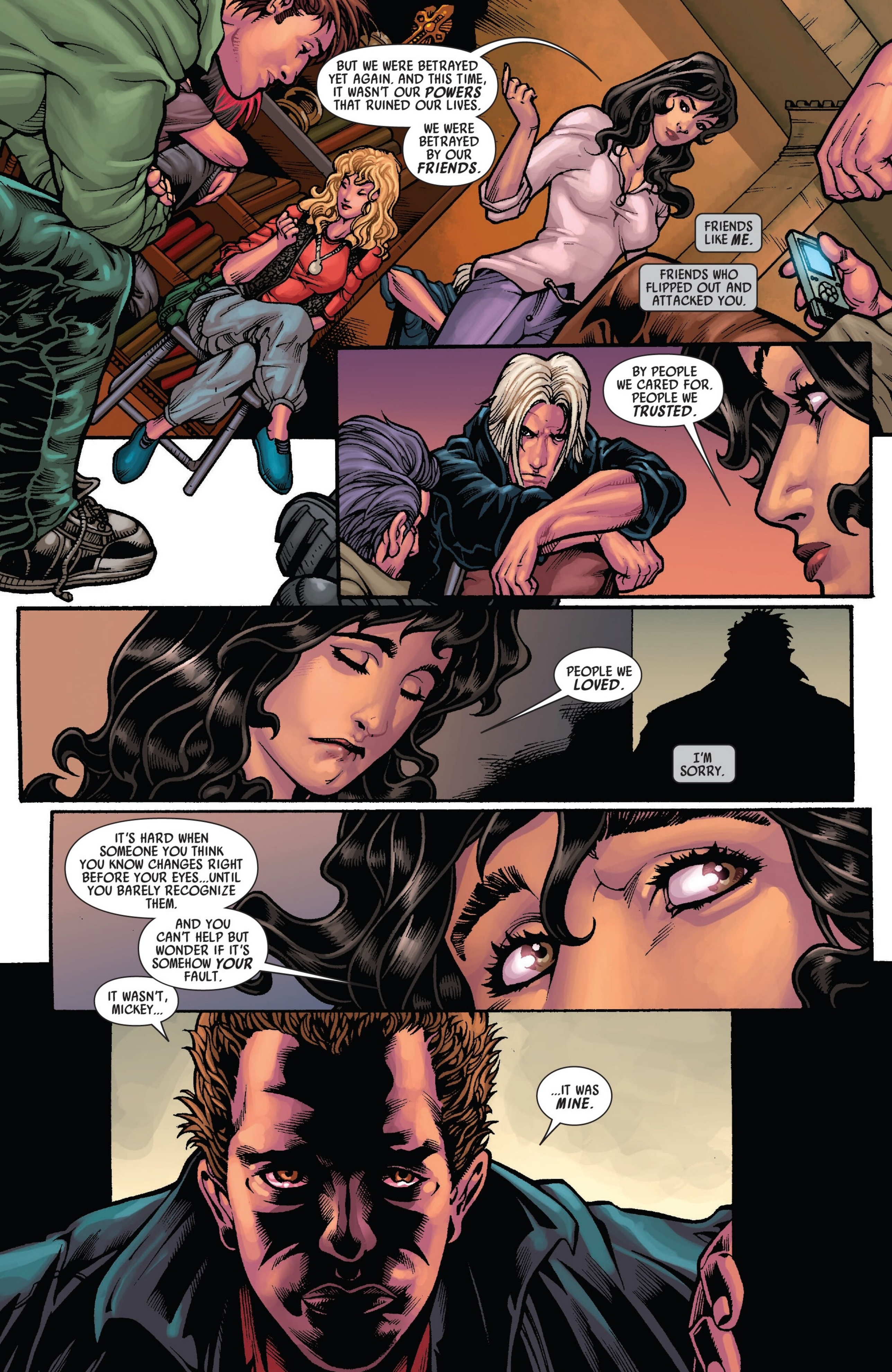

I HAD EVERYTHING UNDER CONTROL! BUT NOW BECAUSE OF YOU I'VE GOT MORE BLOOD ON MY HANDS!

DARKHAWK...?!

GET AWAY! YOU CAN'T HAVE IT!
SMAK

OH MY GOD-- DR. NECKER! I'M SO SORRY! I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S--
IT'S...IT'S ALRIGHT, I-- JUST...STAY CALM.
MY ARMOR. IT'S LIKE IT'S REACTING ON ITS OWN--
SO LET US STUDY IT.
NO! I HAVE TO LEAVE BEFORE IT HURTS SOMEONE ELSE!
CHRIS, WAIT!!
I WAS FINALLY IN CONTROL!
I WON'T LET YOU DO THIS TO ME AGAIN!
THAT'S THE FUNNY THING ABOUT LEAVING YOUR PAST BEHIND...
WHOOOOSH
...NO MATTER HOW FAR YOU RUN, IT ALWAYS CATCHES UP TO YOU...

HOLY TRINITY CATHOLIC CHURCH, MANHATTAN.
...OR YOU CATCH UP TO IT.
TAXI
MY NAME'S MICKEY MUSASHI AND I WAS THE FORMER SUPER HERO TURBO.
HI, MICKEY.
HI, MICKEY. I KNEW YOU'D EVENTUALLY GET YOUR LITTLE SUPPORT GROUP OF "LONERS" BACK TOGETHER HERE IN NEW YORK.
I'M GLAD YOU ALL COULD MAKE IT. I KNOW SOME OF YOU HAD YOUR DOUBTS...PROBABLY ASKED YOURSELF THE SAME QUESTIONS I DID.
HOW COULD WE LET THIS HAPPEN TO US? WHY BOTHER TO CONTINUE MEETING? WHAT'S THE POINT ANYMORE?
AND UNFORTUNATELY, THERE ARE NO EASY ANSWERS.
BUT WE'LL FIND THEM, TOGETHER.
FOR YOU NEW FACES, HERE'S THE DEAL: BACK IN L.A. WE TRIED TO GIVE UP THE COSTUMES AND SECRETS, TO RELY ON EACH OTHER TO KEEP US HONEST.


BUT WE WERE BETRAYED YET AGAIN. AND THIS TIME, IT WASN'T OUR POWERS THAT RUINED OUR LIVES.
WE WERE BETRAYED BY OUR FRIENDS.
FRIENDS LIKE ME.
FRIENDS WHO FLIPPED OUT AND ATTACKED YOU.
BY PEOPLE WE CARED FOR. PEOPLE WE TRUSTED.
PEOPLE WE LOVED.
I'M SORRY.
IT'S HARD WHEN SOMEONE YOU THINK YOU KNOW CHANGES RIGHT BEFORE YOUR EYES...UNTIL YOU BARELY RECOGNIZE THEM.
AND YOU CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER IF IT'S SOMEHOW YOUR FAULT.
IT WASN'T, MICKEY...
...IT WAS MINE.

LOOK, I KNOW MY TIMING COULDN'T BE WORSE, BUT--

DUDE...

...YOU SHOULD TURN AROUND *RIGHT NOW.*

JOHNNY... MICKEY...PLEASE--

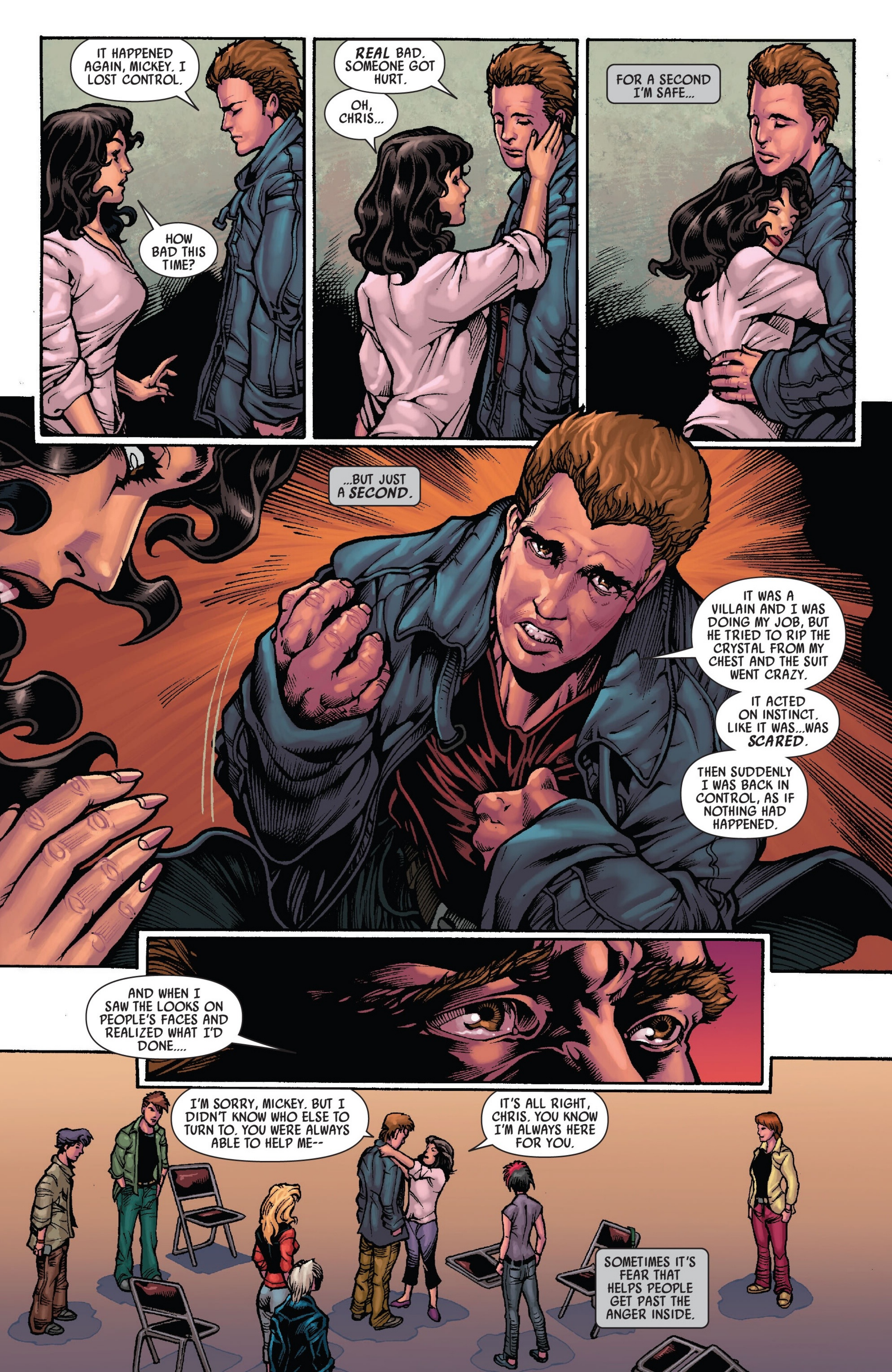
HOW *DARE* YOU SHOW YOUR FACE HERE?! AFTER YOU TURNED YOUR BACK ON US--WENT BACK TO YOUR PRECIOUS *COSTUME.*

PLEASE, MICKEY, I NEED--

HELP.

NEED TO *WHAT?* GLOAT? TO FEEL BETTER ABOUT YOURSELF?

I NEED YOUR *HELP.*


IT HAPPENED AGAIN, MICKEY. I LOST CONTROL.
HOW BAD THIS TIME?
REAL BAD. SOMEONE GOT HURT.
OH, CHRIS...
FOR A SECOND I'M SAFE...
...BUT JUST A SECOND.
IT WAS A VILLAIN AND I WAS DOING MY JOB, BUT HE TRIED TO RIP THE CRYSTAL FROM MY CHEST AND THE SUIT WENT CRAZY.
IT ACTED ON INSTINCT. LIKE IT WAS...WAS SCARED.
THEN SUDDENLY I WAS BACK IN CONTROL, AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED.
AND WHEN I SAW THE LOOKS ON PEOPLE'S FACES AND REALIZED WHAT I'D DONE....
I'M SORRY, MICKEY. BUT I DIDN'T KNOW WHO ELSE TO TURN TO. YOU WERE ALWAYS ABLE TO HELP ME--
IT'S ALL RIGHT, CHRIS. YOU KNOW I'M ALWAYS HERE FOR YOU.
SOMETIMES IT'S FEAR THAT HELPS PEOPLE GET PAST THE ANGER INSIDE.

SO LIKE ANY GOOD SPONSOR, MICKEY DID HER BEST TO HELP ME.

YOU WORK AT A GOVERNMENT LAB THAT SPECIALIZES IN ALIEN ENERGIES AND YOU NEVER ASKED ANYONE THERE TO STUDY YOU OR THE ARMOR?!

I DIDN'T WANT TO BECOME ONE OF THEIR *EXPERIMENTS*, LIKE SOME *LAB RAT*...

WILL YOU GET *OVER* YOURSELF? THIS IS NOT ABOUT *YOU*--THIS IS ABOUT THE PEOPLE *WHO CARE ABOUT YOU*.

ISN'T THAT WHY YOU LEFT IN THE FIRST PLACE?

TRY ALL YOU WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD...

...BUT NOTHING'S GOING TO BE DIFFERENT IF YOU DON'T START BY CHANGING *YOURSELF*.

THE DARKHAWK AMULET AND ARMOR ARE PART OF THE PROBLEM, CHRIS. GO AND HAVE IT ALL LOOKED AT.

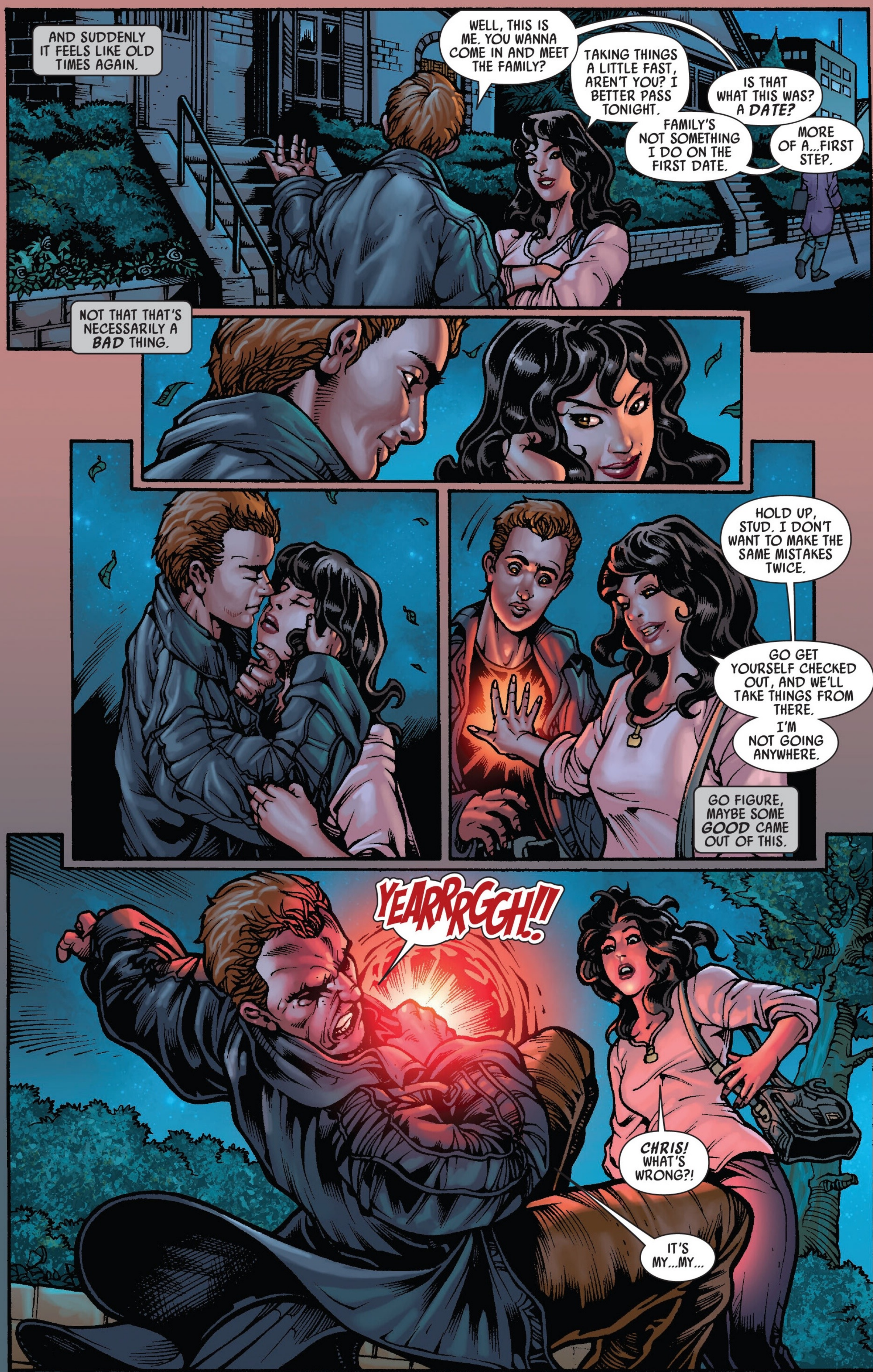
GET SOME HELP. *REAL* HELP. *PROFESSIONAL* HELP.

DO IT FOR THE FAMILY YOU CAME BACK FOR.

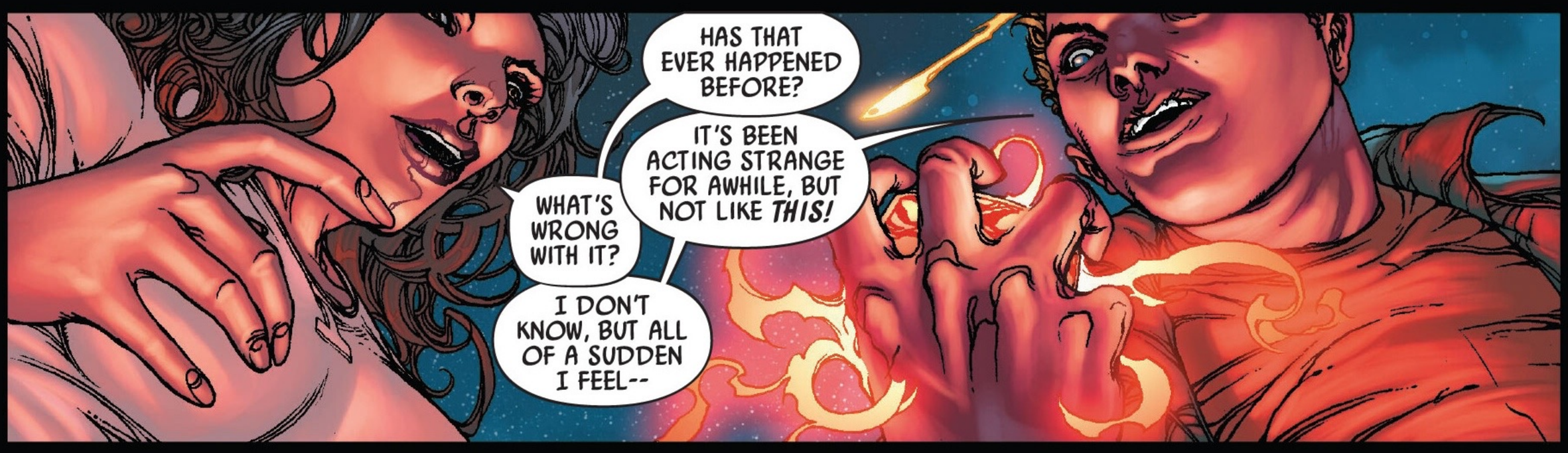
DO IT FOR *ME*.

SHE'S ALWAYS HELPED ME THROUGH DARK TIMES.

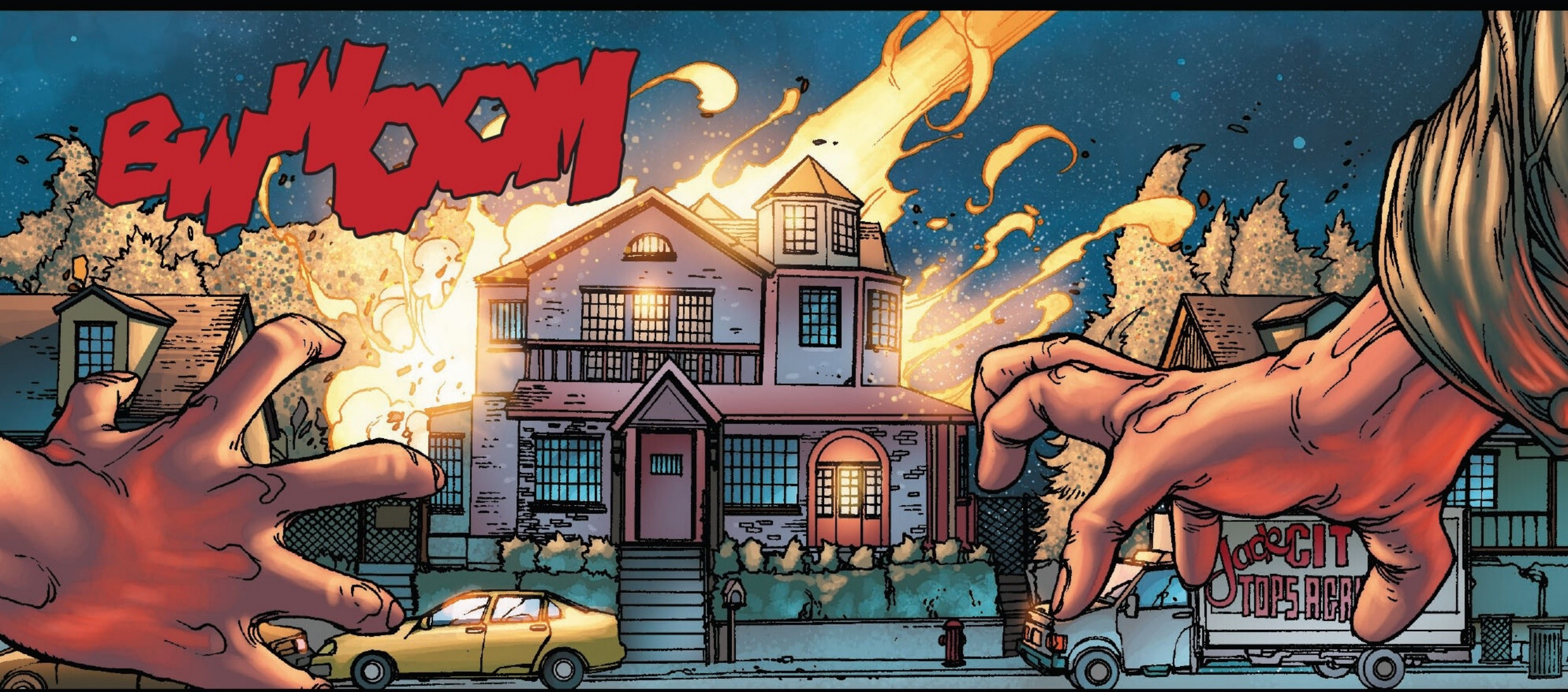
HELPED ME GET BACK IN CONTROL.


AND SUDDENLY IT FEELS LIKE OLD TIMES AGAIN.
WELL, THIS IS ME. YOU WANNA COME IN AND MEET THE FAMILY?
TAKING THINGS A LITTLE FAST, AREN'T YOU? I BETTER PASS TONIGHT.
IS THAT WHAT THIS WAS? A DATE?
FAMILY'S NOT SOMETHING I DO ON THE FIRST DATE.
MORE OF A...FIRST STEP.
NOT THAT THAT'S NECESSARILY A BAD THING.
HOLD UP, STUD. I DON'T WANT TO MAKE THE SAME MISTAKES TWICE.
GO GET YOURSELF CHECKED OUT, AND WE'LL TAKE THINGS FROM THERE.
I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE.
GO FIGURE, MAYBE SOME GOOD CAME OUT OF THIS.
YEARRRGGH!!
CHRIS! WHAT'S WRONG?!
IT'S MY...MY...

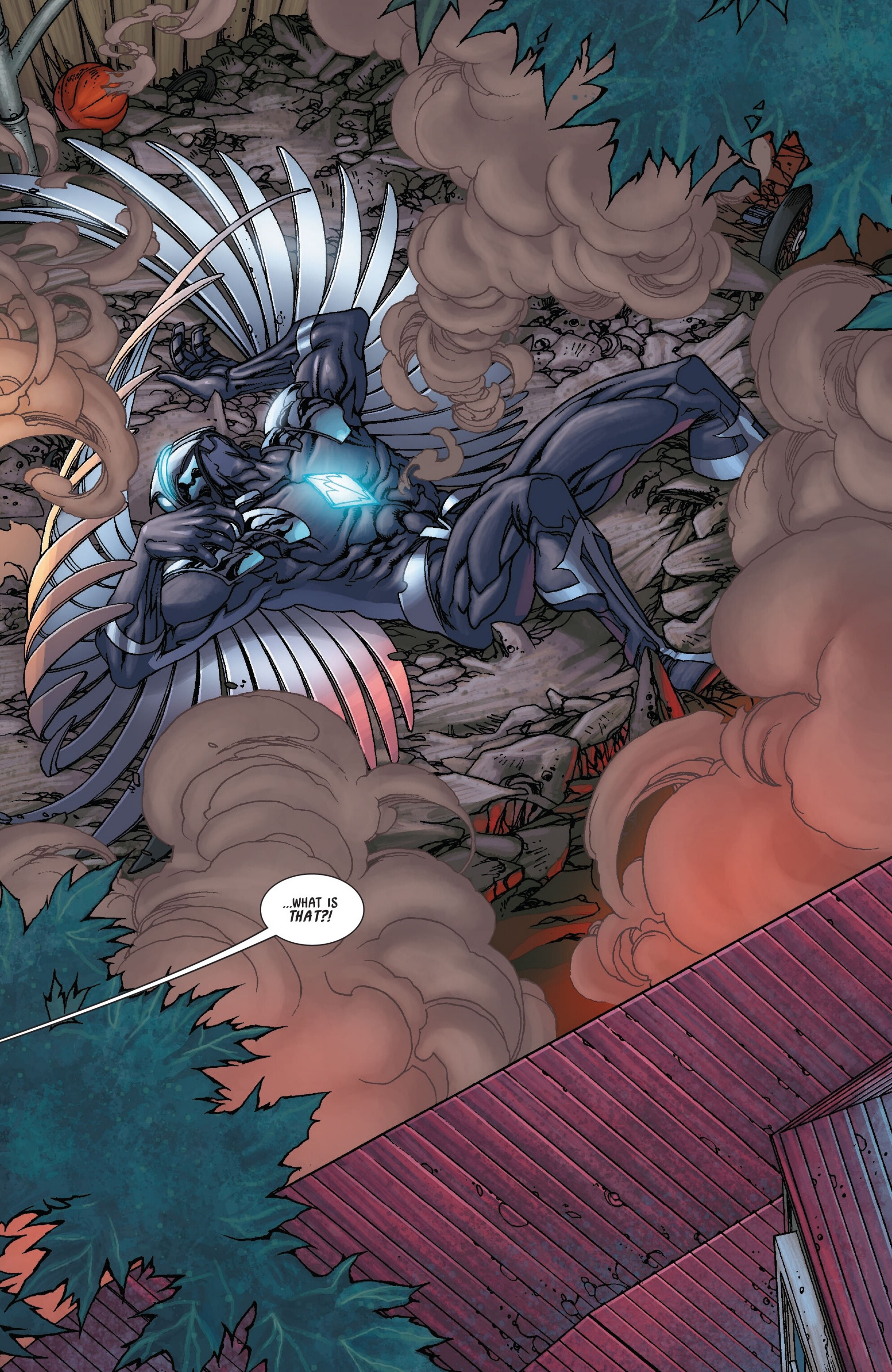
MY AMULET!
IT'S RED HOT! IT...IT'S BURNING ME!!


HAS THAT EVER HAPPENED BEFORE?
IT'S BEEN ACTING STRANGE FOR AWHILE, BUT NOT LIKE THIS!
WHAT'S WRONG WITH IT?
I DON'T KNOW, BUT ALL OF A SUDDEN I FEEL--

SHRRREEEE
WHAT THE--?!


BWHOOM

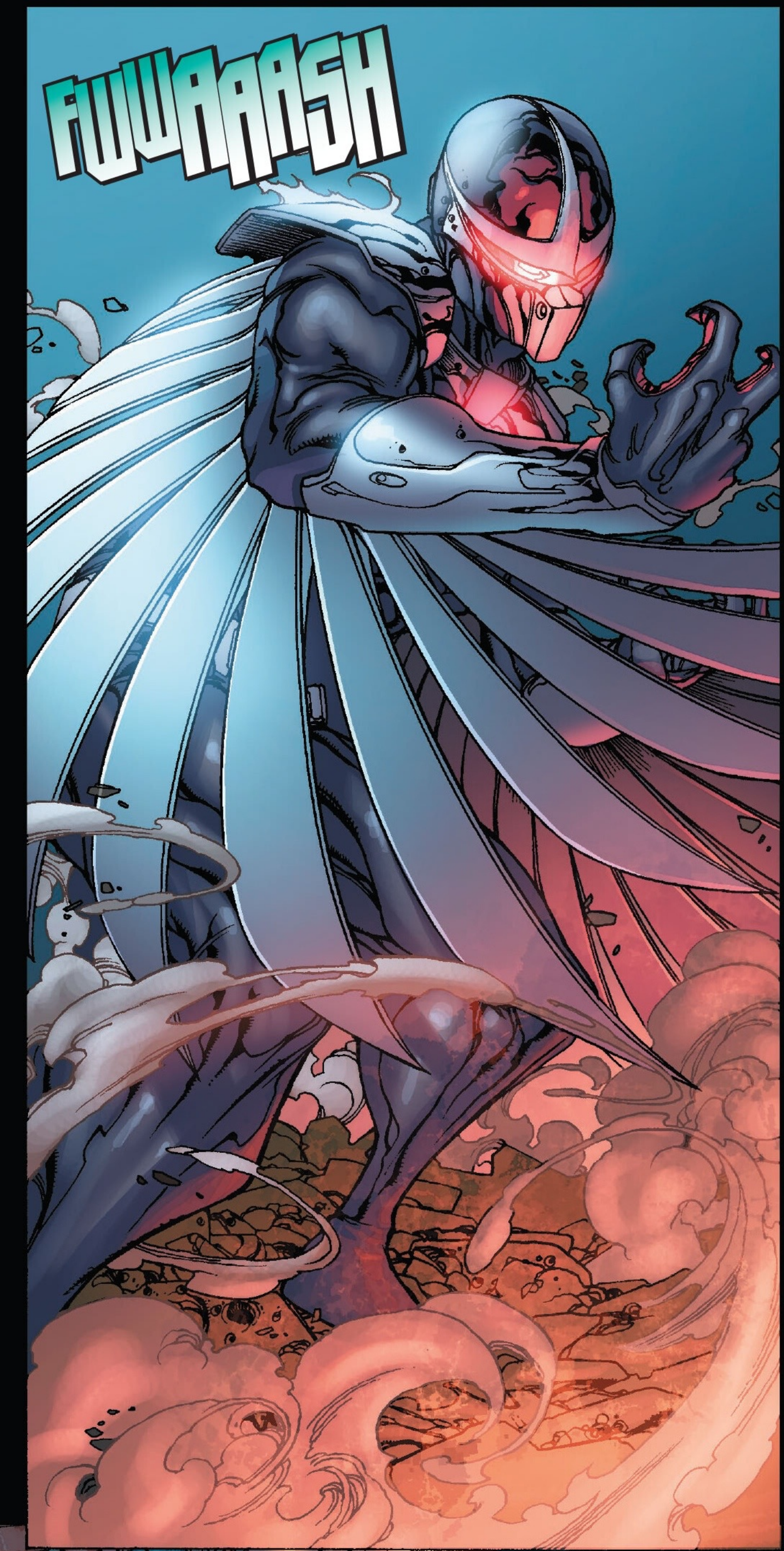
THAT--IT CRASHED IN MY BACKYARD!! IT...

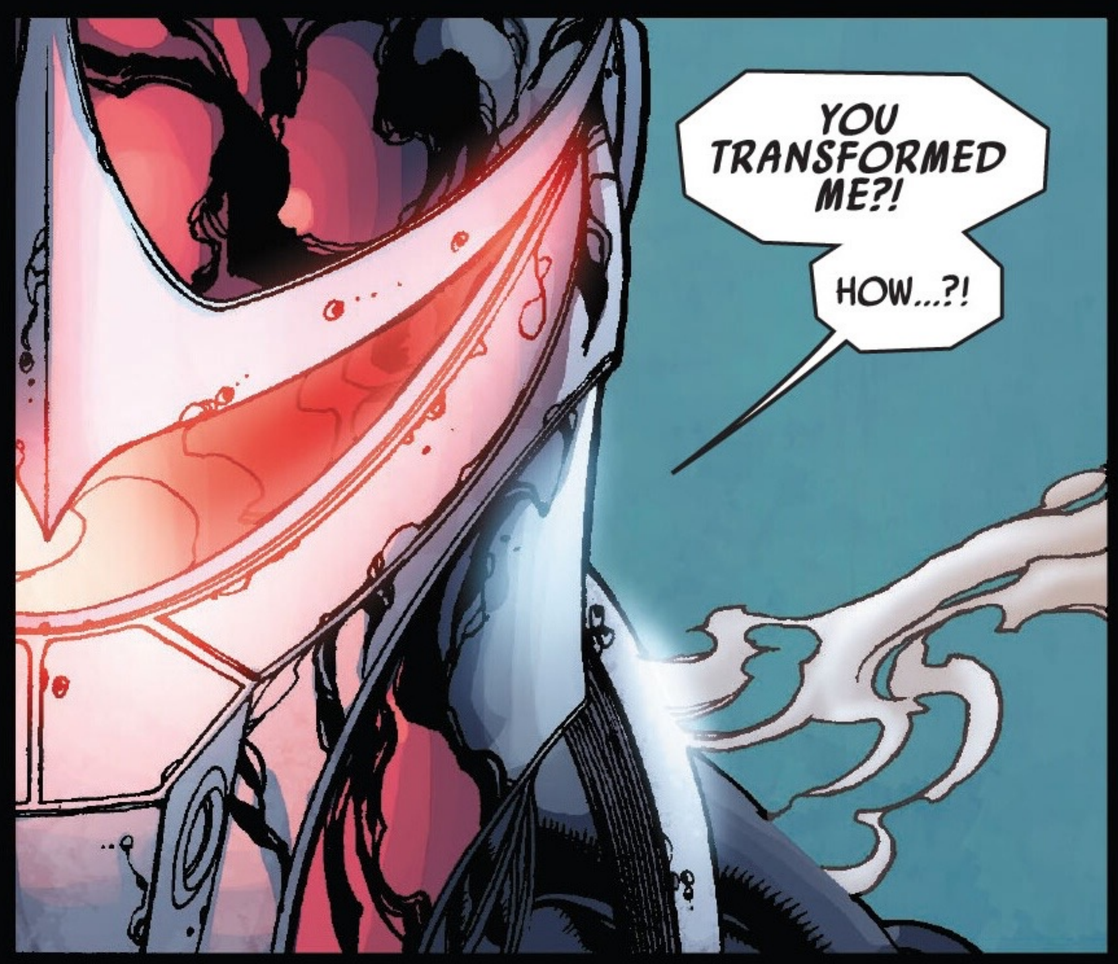

...WHAT IS THAT?!

IT LOOKS LIKE...
ANOTHER DARKHAWK?! BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!
MINE'S THE ONLY AMULET LEFT...
THAT...THAT'S WHAT YOU WERE...LED TO BELIEVE...
...DESIGNATE POWELL...
PLEASE...
CHRIS?!

MOM?

TAKE JASON AND JONATHAN BACK IN THE HOUSE! LOCK THE DOOR AND DIAL THAT EMERGENCY INITIATIVE NUMBER! TELL THEM CODE BLACK!
HOW DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?! WHAT DO YOU WANT?!
I'M HERE... TO SAVE YOU.
SAVE ME?! SAVE ME FROM WHAT?!
YOU CAN'T EVEN SAVE YOURSELF!
I CANNOT... WHICH IS WHY I AM HERE. ONLY TOGETHER... CAN WE...SAVE OURSELVES!
HHRRMMM


FUWAAASH


YOU TRANSFORMED ME?!
HOW...?!

HOW DID YOU DO THAT?
THERE IS SO MUCH...YOU DON'T KNOW, DESIGNATE... POWELL...

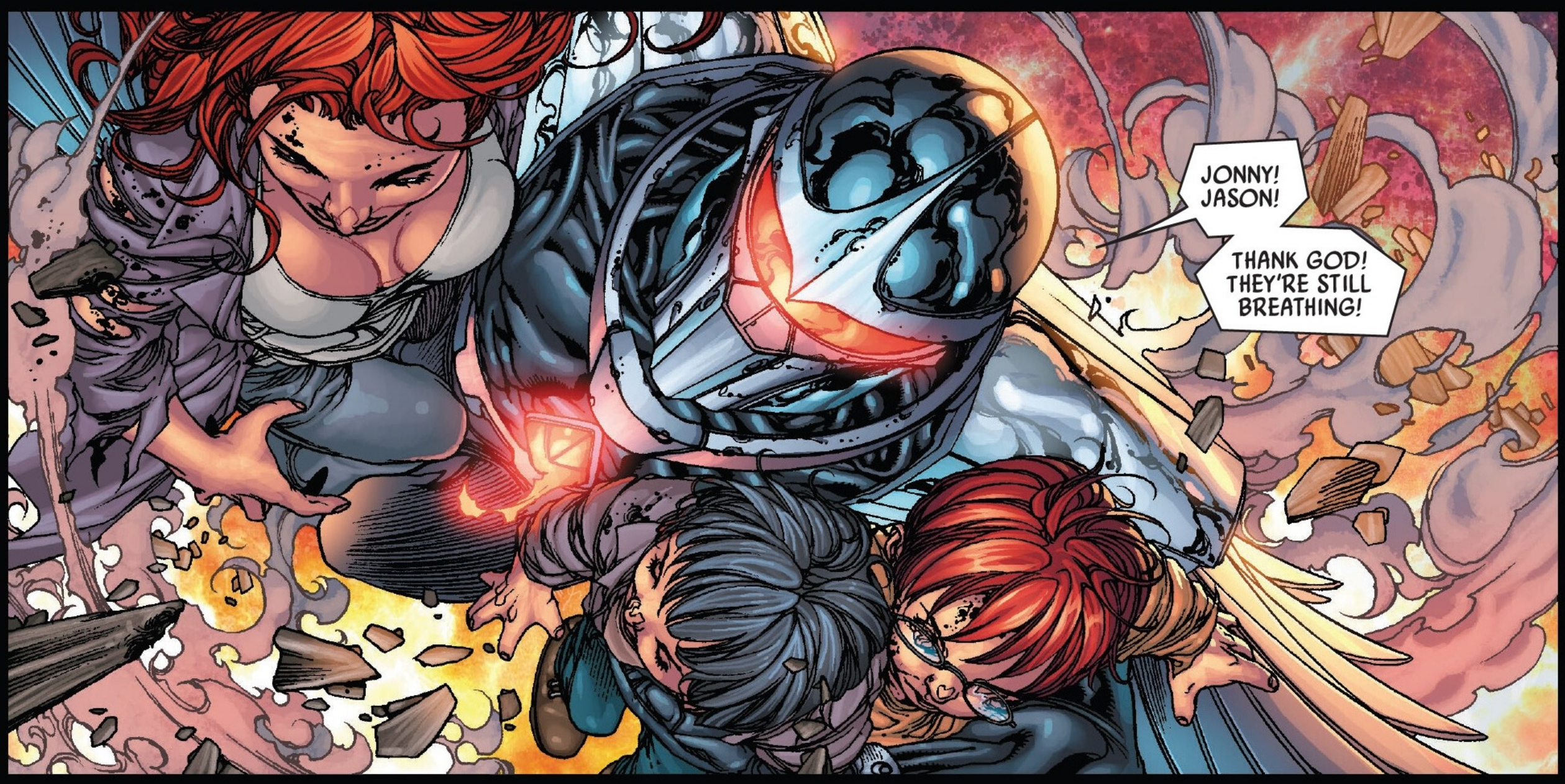
SSHHHREEEEEE

NO! IT'S FOUND US ALREADY!!

CHRIS, I HEARD--
MOM!
GET OUT OF THE--
MY NAME'S CHRIS POWELL...
...AND ALL WAS GOOD IN MY WORLD.
CLAP
UNTIL IT WASN'T.

WAR OF KINGS: DARKHAWK 2

"KEEP CALM, CHRIS! KEEP IT COOL! DON'T GIVE IN TO RAGE!" THAT'S WHAT I KEEP GETTING FROM THE ANGER MANAGEMENT COUNSELORS.
BUT IF THERE WAS EVER A TIME TO BE ANGRY...
...IT'S NOW.
THAT'S MY HOUSE! THAT'S MY [illegible] HOUSE THAT JUST GOT TRASHED! MY HOME--
NO! I HAVE TO KEEP IT TOGETHER! I REFUSE TO FLIP OUT!
IT'S JUST BRICKS AND MORTAR...AS LONG AS MY FAMILY'S OKAY, I....
M-MOM?


JONNY! JASON!
THANK GOD! THEY'RE STILL BREATHING!

MICKEY, CALL 911!
CHRIS, WHAT WAS THAT...*THING* THAT CRASHED INTO YOUR HOUSE?!

DESIGNATE POWELL, IT WOULD BE BETTER FOR THEM IF WE SIMPLY LEFT THIS AREA NOW.
LISTEN TO THE DATASONG. IT SAYS THAT THE HUNTER DRONE THAT WAS CHASING ME IS STILL--

GET AWAY FROM MY FAMILY!!
WHO THE ☠☠☠☠ ARE YOU?
I AM TALON.

UUUNNFF!
ZRRAAAM!!!

WHO'S SHOOTING AT US? WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON...AND...
WHAT IS *THAT?*

A HUNTER DRONE, SENT TO ERADICATE OUR KIND. I TRIED TO WARN Y--

OUR KIND?

THE *FRATERNITY* OF RAPTORS.

DO YOU... NOT KNOW WHAT YOU ARE, DESIGNATE?

I DON'T KNOW *ANYTHING!* YOU CRASH IN MY BACKYARD, THEN THIS MONSTER LEVELS MY HOME!

WHAT THE [illegible] IS GOING ON?

ZRAAM

AND HOW DO I KEEP MY FAMILY OUT OF IT?!

FWWAAASH

HHRRRRRRMMMM

DIDN'T EVEN SCRATCH IT... AND NOW IT'S POWERING UP!

SHHRA

ASSHH

AHHHRR!

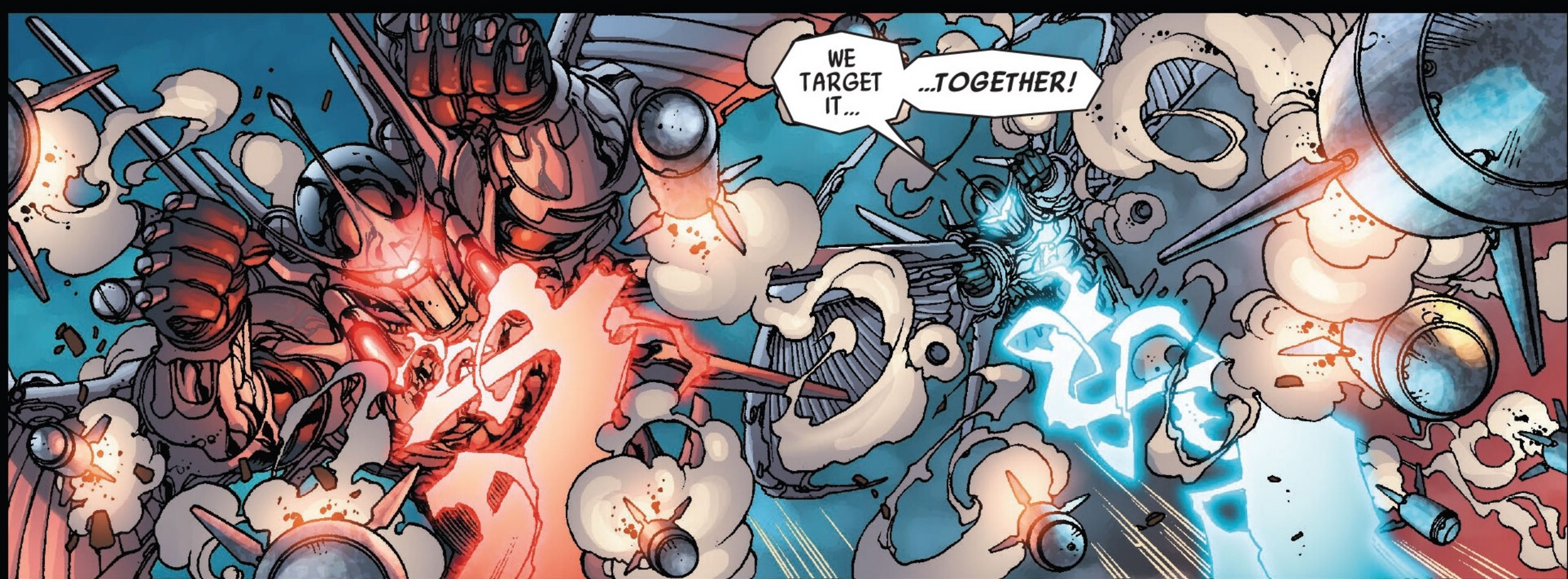
POWELL? AH, BY THE NULL SOURCE!
YOU HAVE RECONFIGURED!
A...A NEW SUIT OF ARMOR?
I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO DO THAT BEFORE...
THE DATASONG WAS WRONG ABOUT YOU. YOUR BOND TO THE AMULET, THOUGH FAULTY, IS DEEPER THAN ANYONE COULD HAVE SUSPECTED.

DESIGNATE POWELL, MAKE HASTE. USE THE STRIKE SUIT YOU'VE RECONFIGURED AND COORDINATE YOUR ATTACK WITH MINE.
BUT HOW DID I--?
SAVE YOUR QUESTIONS. WE SIMPLY NEED TO SURVIVE THE NEXT FEW SECONDS.
I FEEL... SUPER-CHARGED!
USE THAT ENERGY AGAINST THE HUNTER! TARGET ITS WEAPONS ARRAY WHILE I IMMOBILIZE IT.
YOU... YOU CAN CONTROL THE CHANGE?
STRIKE SUIT MODE SHOULD SERVE OUR PURPOSE AGAINST THIS FOE...
HHRRRMM

...STAY AIRBORNE! YOU'VE GOT IT INTERESTED, DESIGNATE!
I CAN HIT IT WITH A MICRO-MUNITION ASSAULT WHILE IT'S DISTRACTED!
WHATEVER YOU'RE DOING, MAKE IT FAST, TALON!
I DON'T LIKE THE WAY IT'S LOOKING AT ME!
HOLY ☠☠☠☠! YOU BLEW IT TO PIECES! THAT WAS BADASS!
THAT WAS COMPLETELY B--
YEOOW!
IT'S NOT DEAD AT ALL, AND IT WON'T LET GO!
CUT YOURSELF FREE, DESIGNATE! NOW!

NHHH! LIKE THIS?

EXCELLENT! NOW FOLLOW ME IN!


WE TARGET IT...
...TOGETHER!

SHKOOOMM

NICELY DONE, DESIGNATE POWELL.

WHY DO YOU KEEP CALLING ME THAT?!

THAT IS WHAT YOU ARE... A DESIGNATE. A *NOVICE*.

A RAPTOR IN TRAINING.

A *WHAT?* WAIT... HOW DID YOU CHANGE YOUR ARMOR LIKE THAT?!

HHRRRMM

IT'S CALLED *RECONFIGURATION*-- YOUR AMULET'S ABILITY TO DRAW VARIANT ARMORS FOR USE--ALL YOU NEED DO IS FOCUS ON YOUR OLD ARMOR AND YOU WILL TRANSFORM BACK.

I'M TRYING, BUT IT'S NOT WORKING!

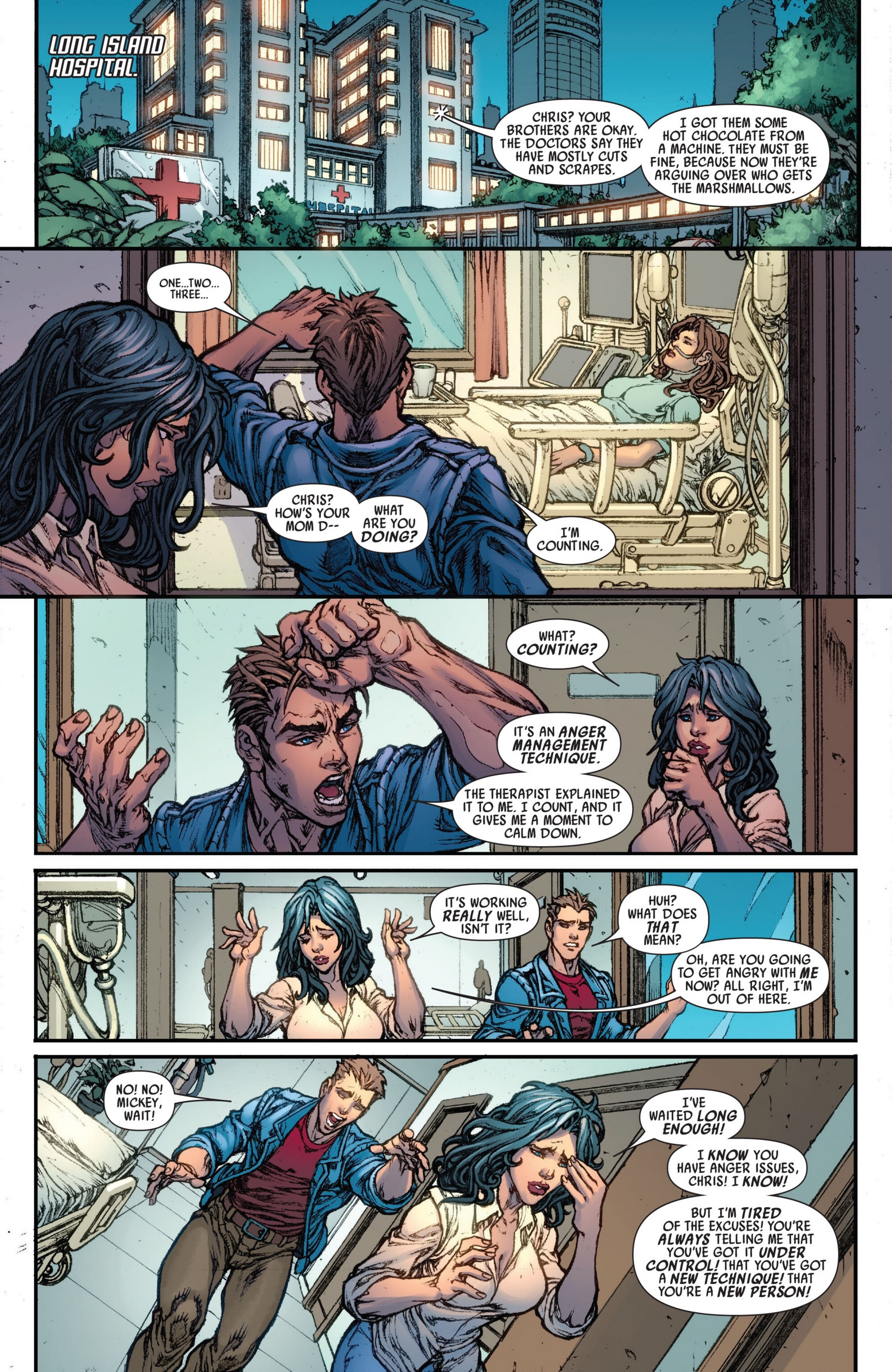
RELAX YOUR MIND. FEEL THE AMULET'S PULSE....

CHRIS?!

WHAT... HOW DID I--?!

HHRRRMM

YOUR ARMOR RESPONDED WHEN YOU WERE SURPRISED... ANOTHER SUBCONSCIOUS REACTION. PUZZLING.
PERHAPS THE STIMULI CAN BE REPEATED TO--
NOT NOW MISTER. NOT NOW.
MICKEY... MY MOM AND BROTHERS...
THE PARAMEDICS ARE HERE. YOUR BROTHERS ARE STABLE. BUT YOUR MOM...I'M SORRY, BUT....
WHERE IS SHE?! TAKE ME--
POWELL, PLEASE. THERE'S NOT MUCH TIME. ANOTHER--
LEAVE ME ALONE! YOU BROUGHT THIS DOWN ON US!
AND AS SOON AS MY FAMILY'S SAFE, YOU OWE ME SOME SERIOUS ANSWERS!


LONG ISLAND HOSPITAL.
CHRIS? YOUR BROTHERS ARE OKAY. THE DOCTORS SAY THEY HAVE MOSTLY CUTS AND SCRAPES.
I GOT THEM SOME HOT CHOCOLATE FROM A MACHINE. THEY MUST BE FINE, BECAUSE NOW THEY'RE ARGUING OVER WHO GETS THE MARSHMALLOWS.
ONE...TWO... THREE...
CHRIS? HOW'S YOUR MOM D--
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
I'M COUNTING.
WHAT? COUNTING?
IT'S AN ANGER MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUE.
THE THERAPIST EXPLAINED IT TO ME. I COUNT, AND IT GIVES ME A MOMENT TO CALM DOWN.
IT'S WORKING REALLY WELL, ISN'T IT?
HUH? WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?
OH, ARE YOU GOING TO GET ANGRY WITH ME NOW? ALL RIGHT, I'M OUT OF HERE.
NO! NO! MICKEY, WAIT!
I'VE WAITED LONG ENOUGH!
I KNOW YOU HAVE ANGER ISSUES, CHRIS! I KNOW!
BUT I'M TIRED OF THE EXCUSES! YOU'RE ALWAYS TELLING ME THAT YOU'VE GOT IT UNDER CONTROL! THAT YOU'VE GOT A NEW TECHNIQUE! THAT YOU'RE A NEW PERSON!

THEN YOU FLIP OUT AGAIN! YOU GO CRAZY!

AND EVERYTHING SETS YOU OFF! EVERY LAST THING! EVERY SLIGHTEST THING!

I'M SO SICK OF HEARING YOU SAY "OH, IT WAS THIS PARTICULAR THING, IT WAS SOOOO EXTREME" OR "I'M GETTING PRETTY GOOD BUT THIS ONE THING MADE ME SNAP"!

IT'S EVERYTHING! CAN'T YOU SEE THAT?

MICKEY...

YOU MAKE EXCUSES...YOU BLAME EVERYTHING... EXCEPT YOURSELF!

AND IT'S YOU, CHRIS! IT'S ALL YOU!

IT'S THAT ☠☠☠☠ ARMOR! FROM THE MOMENT YOU FOUND IT, IT'S MESSED YOU UP!

NO, IT--

IT'S MESSED YOU UP, YOU IDIOT! AND NOT JUST YOUR LIFE! MINE TOO! THE PEOPLE YOU CALL FRIENDS! YOUR BROTHERS!

YOUR MOM!

IT MAKES YOU ANGRY! IT MAKES YOU CRAZY!

YOU'VE GOT TO GET RID OF IT. I MEAN IT. JUST GET RID OF IT BEFORE IT RUINS YOUR LIFE COMPLETELY.

I CAN'T! YOU KNOW I CAN'T! IT'S BONDED INTO ME! I CAN'T LET GO OF IT!

CAN'T YOU? CAN'T YOU REALLY? OR IS THAT JUST THE ADDICTION TALKING?

IT'S NOT LIKE THAT!

IT IS! YOU LIKE IT! I THINK YOU LOVE IT! YOU LOVE THE POWER AND THE RUSH OF BEING A BIG, ANGRY TOUGH GUY!

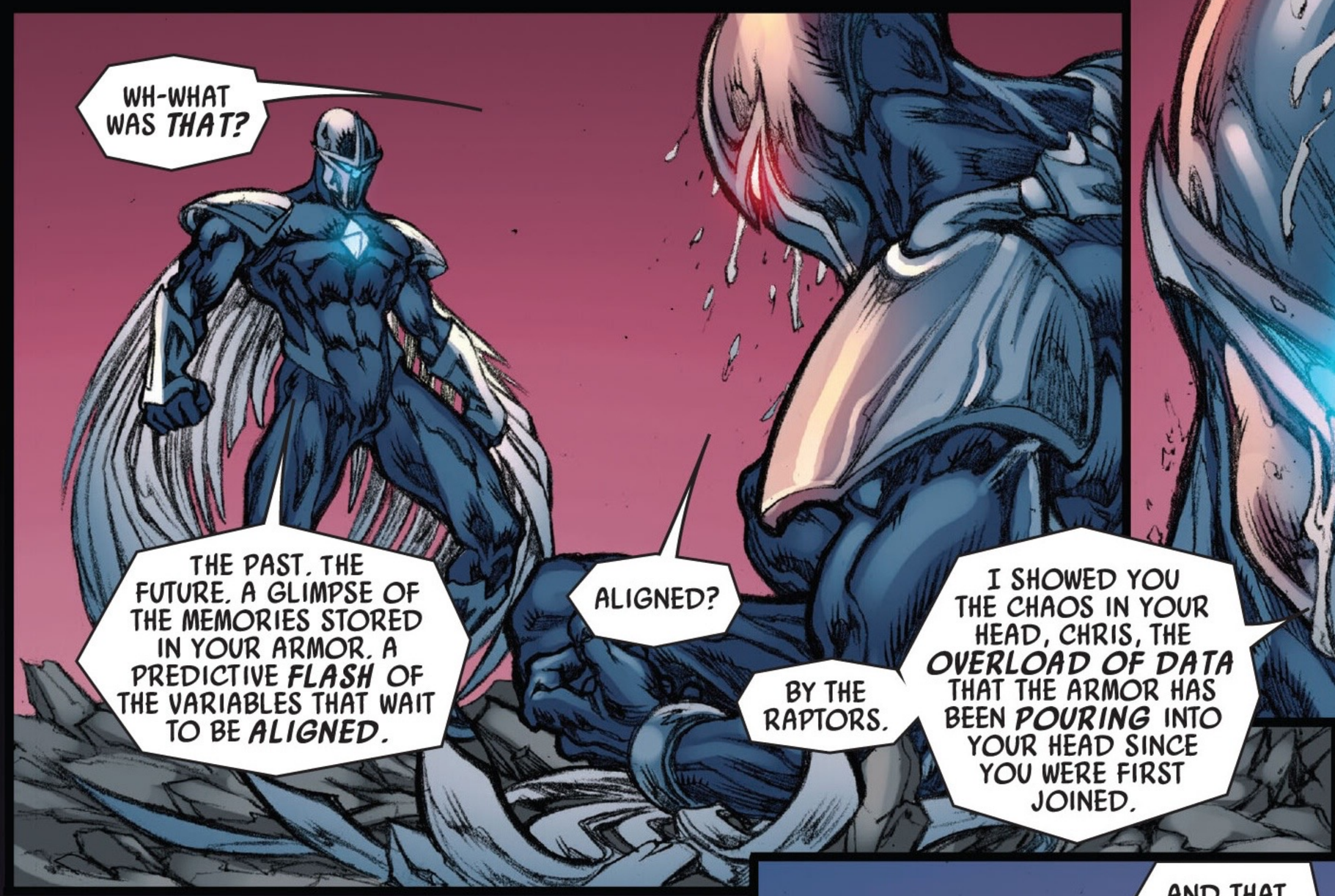
NO!

SO GIVE IT UP! GIVE IT UP AND BE A NORMAL GUY AGAIN!
OR GET HELP! REAL HELP, I MEAN! THAT TALON GUY WHO SHOWED UP TONIGHT--
COME ON! THANKS TO HIM, MY MOM'S IN A COMA!
OH GOD, LISTEN TO YOURSELF!
HE WAS ON YOUR SIDE! HE WAS FIGHTING ON YOUR SIDE!
NOOO!
HE SAID HE COULD HELP YOU! HE SAID HE WANTED TO HELP YOU AND--
HE PUT MY MOTHER IN A HOSPITAL BED!
CHRIS?! NO! WHAT ARE YOU--
HRRRMMMMM
TALON.
OH, NO! OH, NO NO!

DON'T D--
KREESHH
YOUR FRIEND IS ADVISING YOU NOT TO FIGHT ME, DESIGNATE POWELL.
DON'T CALL ME THAT!
WHAT SHOULD I CALL YOU, THEN?
DARKHAWK! I'M DARKHAWK!

YOU ARE AN ANGRY CHILD PLAYING WITH TOYS YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND.
UGHN!
I HAVE COME A GREAT DISTANCE AND AT GREAT COST TO FIND YOU.
THE FRATERNITY OF RAPTORS IS NEEDED NOW, MORE THAN EVER. THE GALAXY NEEDS US.
YOU AND I ARE THE ONLY ONES LEFT.
SMACK
GUUH!

YOU'RE TALKING CRAP!
I CAME TO TEACH YOU WHAT YOU ARE, CHRIS.
I CAME TO FIND MY LAST COMRADE IN ARMS.
I CAME TO HELP SAVE THE FUTURE.
THAT DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING!
IT MEANS EVERYTHING.
I NEED TO HELP YOU UNTANGLE YOUR MIND, CHRIS. THE RAPTOR ARMOR WAS NOT BUILT FOR HUMANS.
YOU HAVE NEVER PROPERLY BONDED WITH IT, AND ITS ALIEN PRESENCE IN YOUR HEAD IS DRIVING YOU INSANE.
SEE FOR YOURSELF!
AGGHHHHHHH!


WH-WHAT WAS THAT?
THE PAST. THE FUTURE. A GLIMPSE OF THE MEMORIES STORED IN YOUR ARMOR. A PREDICTIVE FLASH OF THE VARIABLES THAT WAIT TO BE ALIGNED.
ALIGNED?
BY THE RAPTORS.
I SHOWED YOU THE CHAOS IN YOUR HEAD, CHRIS, THE OVERLOAD OF DATA THAT THE ARMOR HAS BEEN POURING INTO YOUR HEAD SINCE YOU WERE FIRST JOINED.

YOU'VE TRIED TO SHUT IT OUT, OR EXPLAIN IT AWAY, OR IGNORE IT.
BUT IT'S THERE ALL THE TIME, DRIVING YOU CRAZY. MAKING YOU ANGRY.
B...BECAUSE THE ARMOR WASN'T BUILT TO FIT HUMANS?
EXACTLY. YOU FOUND THE ARMOR BY ACCIDENT, BUT IT WAS NEVER INTENDED FOR YOU.

AND THAT HUNTER DRONE?
SENT BY OUR ENEMIES. THERE ARE THOSE THAT OPPOSE THE WORK OF THE RAPTORS.
PLEASE UNDERSTAND, THAT DRONE WILL BE JUST THE FIRST OF MANY.
SO LONG AS YOU ARE BONDED TO THE ARMOR, THEY WILL KEEP COMING FOR YOU. AND YOUR FAMILY WILL BE CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE.

CAN YOU TEACH ME HOW TO USE THE ARMOR? CAN YOU TEACH ME TO FIT IT?
IT'S WHY I'VE COME ACROSS HALF A COSMOS. TO FIND YOU.

The Basement of the Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Manhattan.

HI, CHRIS.

I *REALLY* APPRECIATE YOU GUYS COMING HERE ON SHORT NOTICE.

I KNOW I'VE CAUSED YOU A *LOT* OF TROUBLE RECENTLY. I HAVEN'T BEEN A *MODEL* MEMBER OF THIS GROUP.

HOW'S YOUR MOM, CHRIS?

SHE'S OKAY, JOHNNY. SHE'S STILL IN THE I.C.U., BUT THE DOCTORS ARE MORE HOPEFUL.

AND THAT'S ACTUALLY WHY I ASKED YOU ALL HERE TONIGHT.

LOOK, I'M GOING TO KEEP THIS *SIMPLE*. I BECAME DARKHAWK BY *CHANCE*.

THE ARMOR'S GIVEN ME SOME *GREAT* ADVENTURES AND FRIENDS. SOME *AMAZING* TIMES, TO BE HONEST.

BUT IT'S ALSO *DAMAGED ME*. IT'S BEEN SCREWING WITH MY *HEAD*. SOME SORT OF "*INCOMPATIBILITY PROBLEM*" BETWEEN *ALIEN* TECH AND HUMAN *SOFTWARE*.

I KNOW YOU MAY NOT BELIEVE THAT, OR ACCEPT THAT AS AN EXCUSE. BUT IT'S THE *TRUTH*.

SO I'M SORRY. I'M *SORRY* FOR ALL THE *PAIN* I'VE CAUSED.

NOW I'VE GOT A CHANCE TO GO AWAY AND LEARN HOW TO BE DARKHAWK *FOR REAL.*

IT'S MAKE OR BREAK TIME. I MASTER IT, OR I GET RID OF IT FROM MY LIFE *FOREVER.*

IT SEEMS TO BE *IMPORTANT.* THE DARKHAWK ARMOR IS TIED TO SOMETHING SO *BIG* I BARELY GET IT.

SO, YOU'RE GOING TO GO *AWAY?*

IF I STAY HERE, I'M PUTTING THE PEOPLE I LOVE AT *RISK.*

THERE ARE THINGS *HUNTING* FOR DARKHAWK. I MET ONE LAST NIGHT AND IT NEARLY *KILLED* MY MOM.

I CAN'T BE HERE. I'M *DRAWING* THESE THINGS TO MY FAMILY.

SO I NEED TO GO AWAY AND SORT OUT THIS MESS. I DON'T *WANT* TO LEAVE MY MOM AND MY BROTHERS, BUT THEY'RE SAFER *WITHOUT* ME RIGHT NOW.

I WAS HOPING... MAYBE...

...IF I COULD ASK YOU GUYS TO KEEP AN EYE ON THEM FOR ME WHILE I'M GONE.

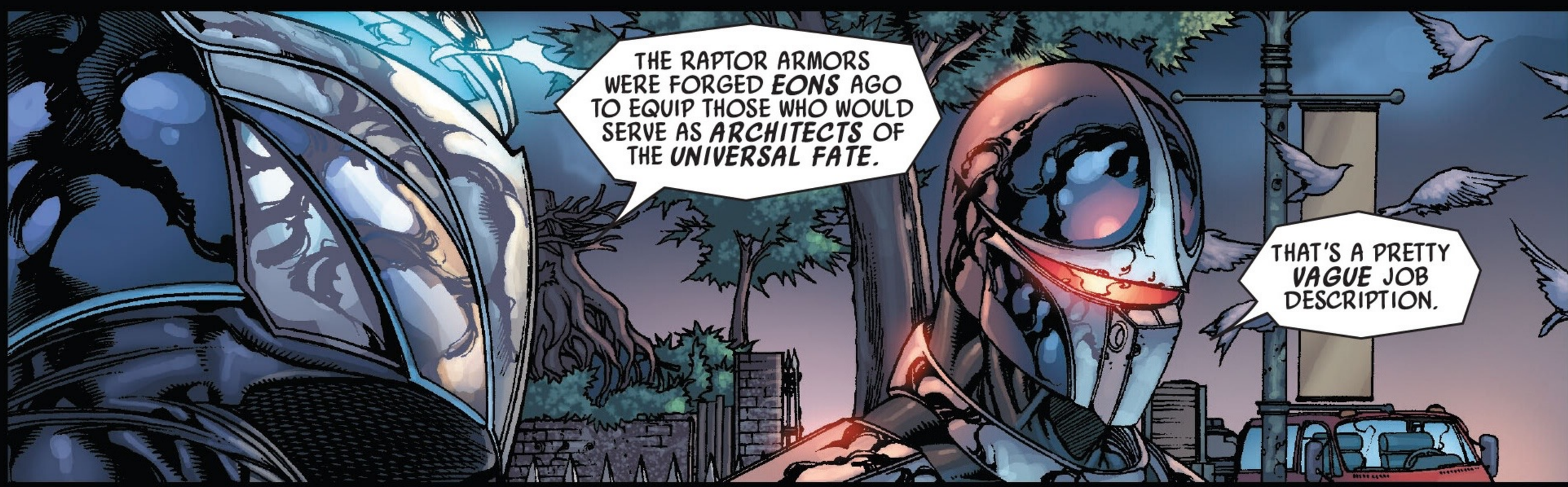
YOU KNOW IT.

THANKS, MICKEY.

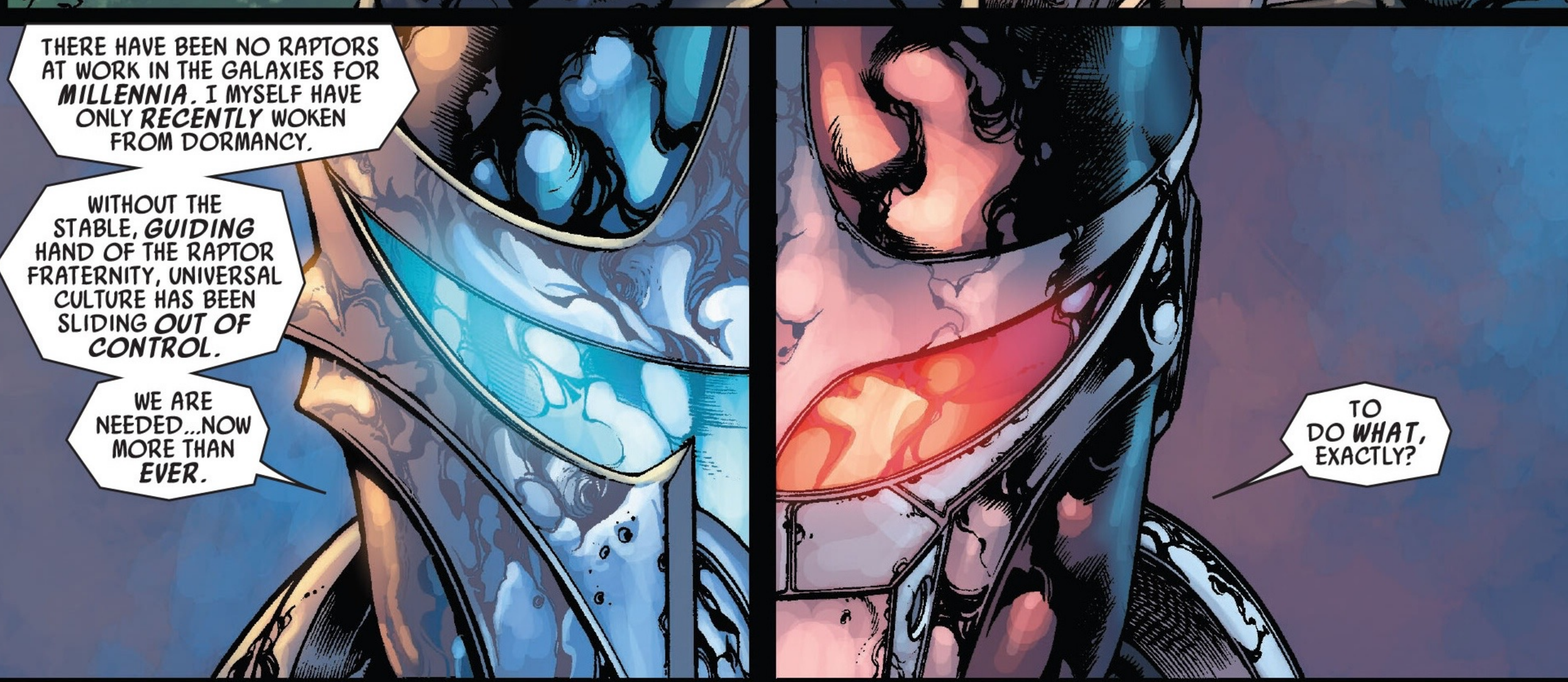
COME BACK.

I *WILL.* FOR YOU.

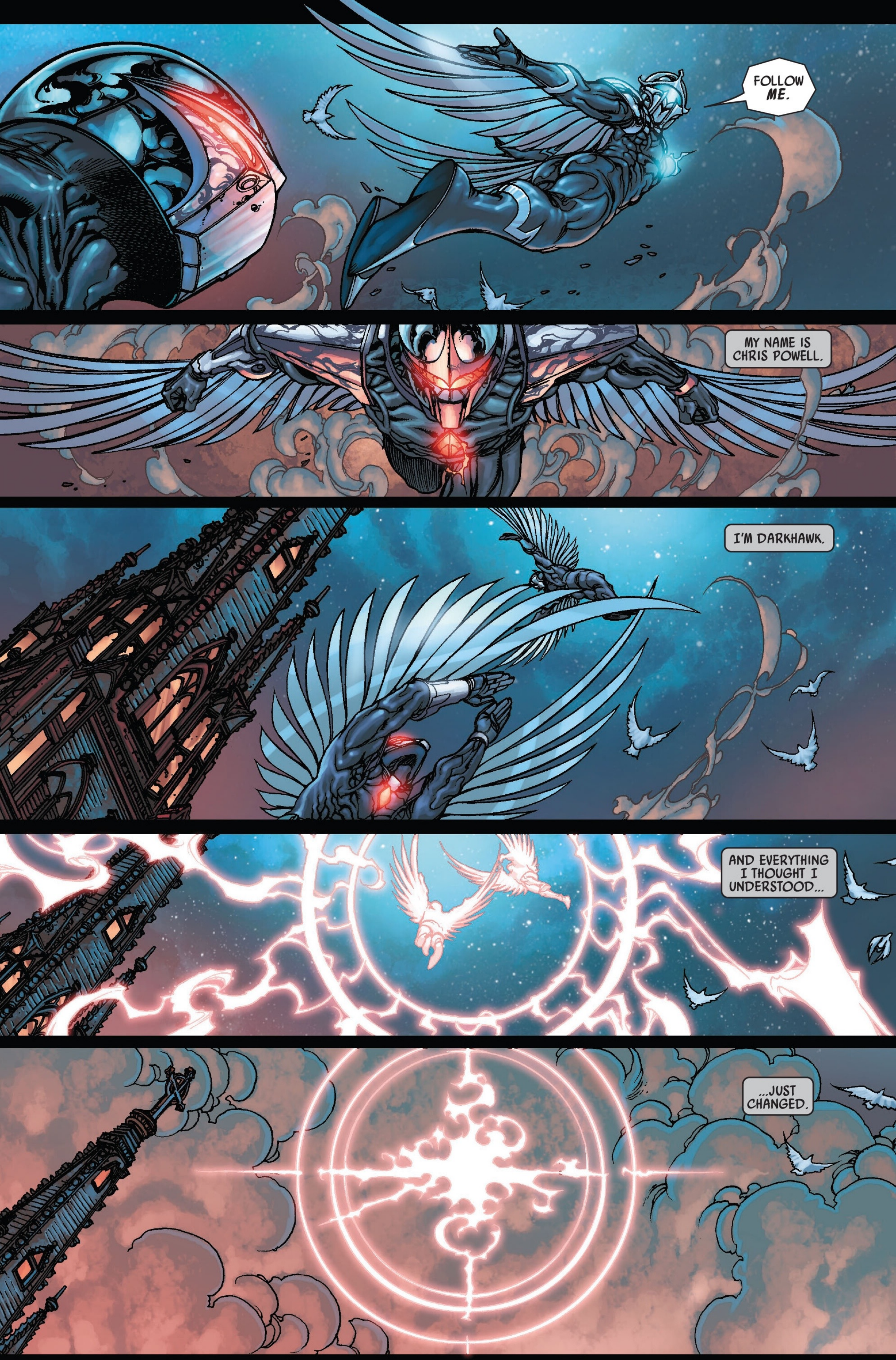
FWWWASSHH
SO WHEN DO WE START?
RIGHT NOW, IF YOU'RE READY, DESIGNATE POWELL.
I TOLD YOU... IT'S DARKHAWK.
VERY WELL...
...DARKHAWK.
SO... WHAT AM I?
YOU ARE A RAPTOR. ONE OF THE LAST TWO IN EXISTENCE.
AND THAT MEANS...?


THE RAPTOR ARMORS WERE FORGED EONS AGO TO EQUIP THOSE WHO WOULD SERVE AS ARCHITECTS OF THE UNIVERSAL FATE.
THAT'S A PRETTY VAGUE JOB DESCRIPTION.

RAPTORS ARE SWORN TO USE ALL THEIR CONSIDERABLE SKILLS AND POWERS TO SAFEGUARD THE ADVANCE OF GALACTIC CULTURE.
WE INFLUENCE, WE ADJUST, WE SHAPE, WE IMPROVE. WE ARE THE CURATORS OF HISTORY AND THE CUSTODIANS OF THE FUTURE.
SO NO PRESSURE, HUH?


THERE HAVE BEEN NO RAPTORS AT WORK IN THE GALAXIES FOR MILLENNIA. I MYSELF HAVE ONLY RECENTLY WOKEN FROM DORMANCY.
WITHOUT THE STABLE, GUIDING HAND OF THE RAPTOR FRATERNITY, UNIVERSAL CULTURE HAS BEEN SLIDING OUT OF CONTROL.
WE ARE NEEDED...NOW MORE THAN EVER.
TO DO WHAT, EXACTLY?

WAR IS ABOUT TO RESHAPE THE LANDSCAPE OF THE COSMOS. WE NEED LEVERAGE, INFLUENCE, IF WE ARE GOING TO PERFORM OUR ROLE FOR THE GREATER GOOD.
WE WILL START IN A PLACE CALLED THE NEGATIVE ZONE.
HEARD OF IT...BUT HOW DO WE GET THERE?


FOLLOW ME.
MY NAME IS CHRIS POWELL.
I'M DARKHAWK.
AND EVERYTHING I THOUGHT I UNDERSTOOD...
...JUST CHANGED.

WAR OF KINGS: WARRIORS 1

THE PLANET THRNN...

I HAVE ACCOMPANIED EMPEROR VULCAN TO DOZENS OF NEWLY CONQUERED PLANETS. BEEN PRESENT FOR THIS SPEECH EVERY TIME.

BUT I HAVE NEVER LISTENED TO THE WORDS. THAT IS NOT MY PLACE. MY ATTENTION MUST BE ELSEWHERE.

I AM *GLADIATOR*. PRAETOR OF THE *IMPERIAL GUARD* OF THE *SHI'AR EMPIRE*.

MY SWORN DUTY IS TO OBEY THE COMMANDS AND PROTECT THE PERSON OF WHOSOEVER SITS UPON THE THRONE.

MY *APPROVAL* OF THEIR POLICIES IS NEITHER REQUIRED. NOR *ASKED*.

IN HIS PUSH TO EXPAND HIS EMPIRE, VULCAN HAS EXTERMINATED ENTIRE CIVILIZATIONS, ENSLAVED COUNTLESS OTHERS.

HE'S MADE MORE THAN A FEW ENEMIES.

THE RIFLE IS A UNIQUE MARRIAGE OF RIGELLIAN PRECISION COMBINED WITH BADOON LETHALITY.

THE GUNMAN CAN SIGHT HIS TARGET FROM ACROSS A CITY, AND STILL PLACE HIS SHOT IN THE VICTIM'S EYE.

IF NOT FOR MY ENHANCED VISION, I'D NEVER HAVE SPOTTED HIM.

THEN I WONDER WHY I HAVEN'T ALREADY SLAIN THE SNIPER.

THIS IS FAR FROM THE FIRST ATTEMPT ON VULCAN'S LIFE. I HAVE NEVER HESITATED TO PUT THEM DOWN WITH EXTREME PREJUDICE.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT NOW?

CAN IT BE...THAT NO ONE *ELSE* HAS SEEN THE DANGER? THAT NO ONE KNOWS *I* HAVE SEEN IT?

I ALLOW MYSELF ANOTHER MOMENT. TO IMAGINE AN EMPIRE, A *UNIVERSE*, WITHOUT VULCAN.

TO EVEN CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY IS *TREASON*. A VIOLATION OF ALL I STAND FOR, OF MY VERY *EXISTENCE*. AND YET...

...IF I SIMPLY STOOD BY A FEW MOMENTS MORE...

ZZKOW

...NO ONE WOULD KNOW I HAD FAILED IN MY DUTY.

NO ONE BUT *ME*...

...AND THE GHOSTS OF MY PAST.
PART 1
DUTY
CHRISTOS GAGE WRITER
MAHMUD ASRAR PENCILER
JEFFREY HUET & MAHMUD ASRAR INKERS
VAL STAPLES COLORIST
DAVE SHARPE LETTERER
MICHAEL HORWITZ ASST EDITOR
BILL ROSEMANN & BEN MORSE EDITORS
JOE QUESADA EDITOR IN CHIEF
DAN BUCKLEY PUBLISHER
ALAN FINE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
STRONTIA. CENTURIES AGO.

TOOM
HNGH!
DO NOT FEAR, TENNET. I HAVE YOU.
CADET KALLARK!
YES, HONORED ELDER?
YOU ABANDONED YOUR TARGET.
I WOULD NOT HAVE EXPECTED A WARRIOR OF YOUR PROUD BLOODLINE TO SHIRK HIS DUTY.
WITH RESPECT, ELDER, I HAVE NOT. HONOR DEMANDS I AID MY COMRADE IF I MAY DO SO WITHOUT COMPROMISING THE MISSION.
AND I ASSURE YOU THAT THE TARGET...
...SHALL BE ACQUIRED!
THRAKOOM

"OBSERVE, CADET TENNET, HOW KALLARK'S CONFIDENCE DOES NOT FALTER, EVEN WHEN HE IS UNEXPECTEDLY ATTACKED BY SORCERY."

"BUT--ELDER, THOSE ARTS ARE ***FORBIDDEN***, BY YOUR OWN DECREE!"

OF COURSE, FOR EVEN OUR STRONGEST ARE VULNERABLE TO ***MAGIC***. WHICH IS EXACTLY WHY WE PERMIT CERTAIN ADEPTS TO ***STUDY*** IT, SO WE MAY BE ***PREPARED*** FOR ITS USE BY AN ENEMY.

A WARRIOR ***MUST*** BE READY FOR ANYTHING, TENNET. OUR PSIONIC - FUELED ABILITIES, FEARSOME AS THEY ARE, DEPEND ENTIRELY ON OUR CONFIDENCE.

SHOULD WE ***DOUBT*** OURSELVES--***QUESTION*** OURSELVES, AS YOU DID WHEN STRUCK BY THE STRONTIUM MISSILE--OUR POWER FADES.

WE ARE NOT ***MACHINES***. WE ***ALL*** FEEL UNCERTAINTY. BUT WE MUST BANISH IT--OVERCOME IT. OR WE WILL ***FALL***...AS YOU LEARNED.

TO MY ETERNAL ***SHAME***. I WILL DO BETTER NEXT TIME, ELDER.

NO, TENNET. FOR YOU, THE TRIAL IS OVER. YOU WILL BE A VALUED MEMBER OF OUR ARMY, BUT IN ***THESE*** CONTESTS, THERE IS ***NO ROOM*** FOR ERROR.

YOUR PRISONER, ELDER.

WELL DONE, KALLARK. YOU HAVE WON A SPOT ON THE FINAL ROSTER.

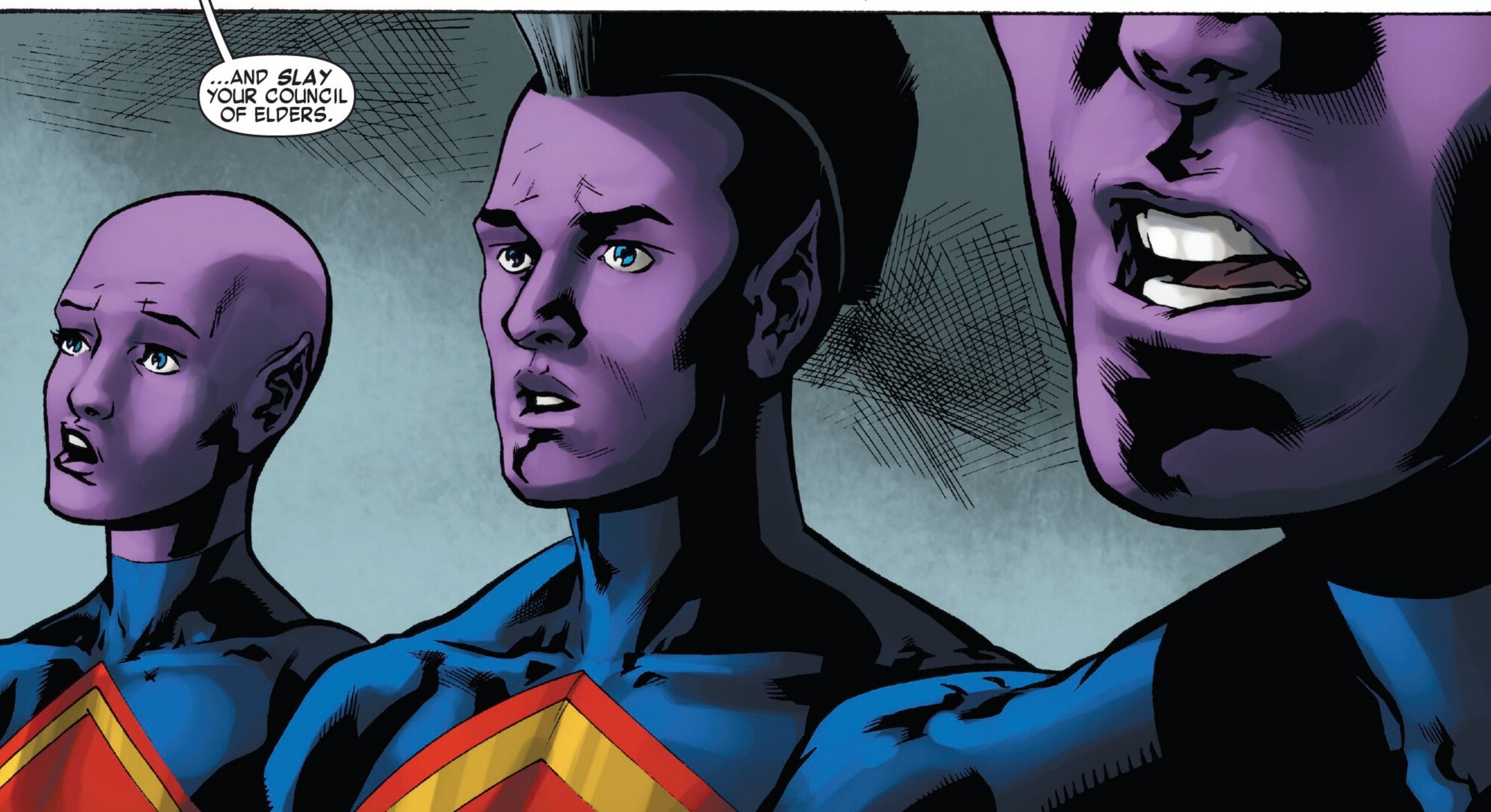
BUT DO NOT THINK YOUR CHALLENGES ARE ENDED. THE MOST DIFFICULT IS YET TO COME...

ONE HOUR LATER...
BY ROYAL DECREE, THE SHI'AR'S NEW *IMPERIAL GUARD* WILL BE A COMPANY OF *ELITES.* EACH RACE IN THE EMPIRE MAY SEND ONLY ITS *FINEST* WARRIOR.
TO REPRESENT YOUR PEOPLE IS THE *HIGHEST* HONOR...AND ANY OF THE TEN OF YOU WOULD SERVE STRONTIA WITH DISTINCTION.
HOWEVER, THERE IS ROOM FOR BUT *ONE.* SO THERE WILL BE A *FINAL* TRIAL.
"YOUR NATURAL ABILITIES, ALREADY PRODIGIOUS, SHALL BE ENHANCED TO *GLADIATOR* LEVEL.
"YOU WILL BE ABLE TO SURVIVE IN THE VACUUM OF SPACE. YOUR POWER SHALL BE *UNMATCHED* THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSE.
"FEW CAN SURVIVE THE GLADIATOR PROCESS. FEWER STILL POSSESS THE *STRENGTH OF CHARACTER* TO BE TRUSTED WITH ITS GIFTS."
ALL OF YOU ARE WORTHY. EVEN WE, YOUR COUNCIL OF ELDERS, COULD NOT CHOOSE AMONG YOU.
THERE IS ONLY *ONE,* IN ALL THE EMPIRE, WHO CAN.

SHI'AR IMPERIAL FLAGSHIP, "SHARRA'S TALON."
ALL HAIL T'KORR!
THIS IS THE BEST THE STRONTIANS COULD DO?
YES, MAJESTOR.
THEY'RE YOUNG.
ONLY THE YOUNG CAN SURVIVE THE GLADIATOR PROCESS. BUT REST ASSURED THEY ARE CAPABLE. EVEN AN ORDINARY STRONTIAN HAS THE POWER TO DECIMATE AN ARMY.
MMM. AND TELL ME, CHANCELLOR VITANA, WHY DID MY FATHER ACCEPT STRONTIANS INTO THE SHI'AR EMPIRE? DID HE NOT FEAR SO POWERFUL A PEOPLE MIGHT THREATEN HIS THRONE?
YOUR FATHER BROUGHT THEM THE CURE TO THE WRAITH PLAGUE THAT RAVAGED THEIR PLANET. IN RETURN, THEY SWORE UNENDING LOYALTY TO THE SHI'AR THRONE.
STRONTIANS VALUE NOTHING ABOVE HONOR AND DUTY. THEIR FEALTY IS WITHOUT QUESTION.
INDEED?
LET US SEE IF THAT'S TRUE.

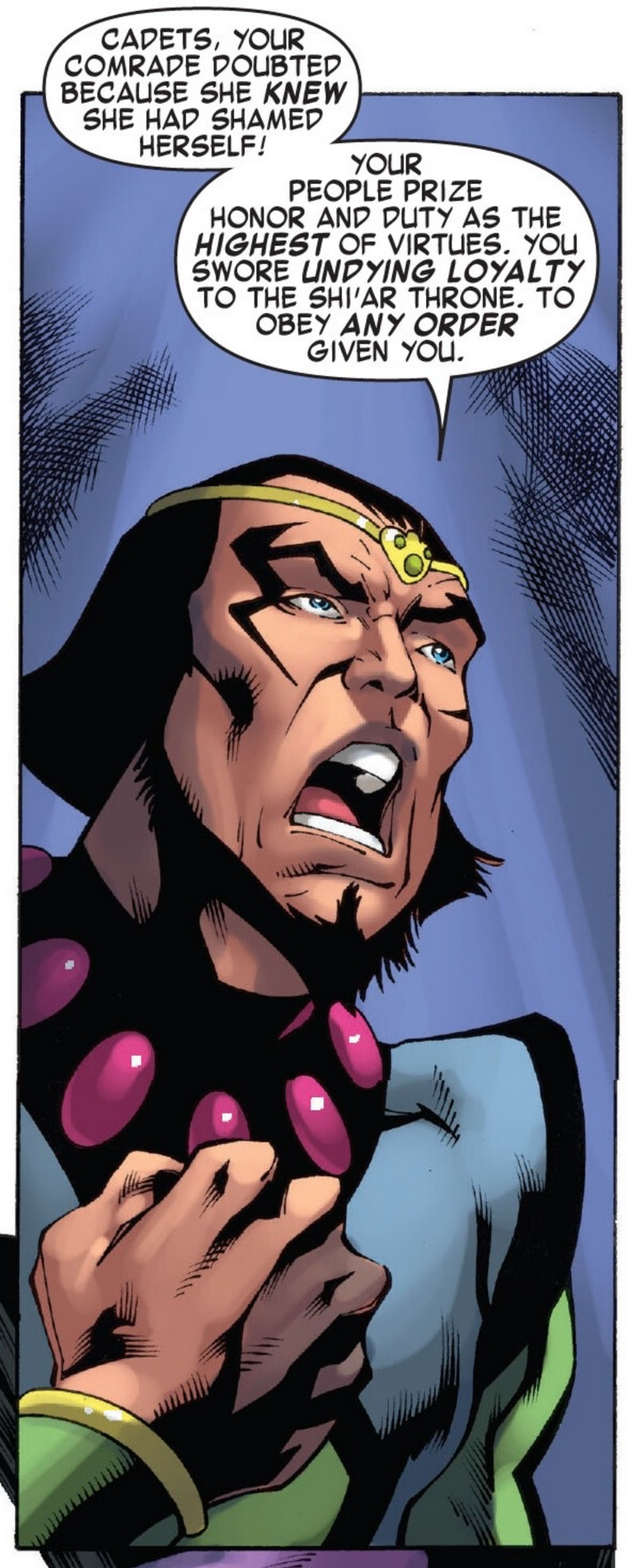
CADETS, I WILL MAKE MY FINAL SELECTION AFTER OBSERVING HOW YOU CONDUCT YOURSELVES ON A MISSION OF *UTMOST IMPORTANCE.*
THERE IS A GROUP WHOSE EXISTENCE CONCERNS ME. THEY ARE WISE AND POWERFUL. ONE DAY THEY MAY PLOT AGAINST MY RULE.

YOU SHALL SOLVE THIS PROBLEM FOR ME.
YOUR MISSION, CADETS, IS TO RETURN TO YOUR HOME...


...AND *SLAY* YOUR COUNCIL OF ELDERS.

Y-YOU'RE MAD! WE WOULD SOONER DIE THAN HARM THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS!
TSK THE YOUTH OF TODAY.
A MOMENT AGO, YOU WERE PLEDGING YOURSELVES TO MY SERVICE AS MEMBERS OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD. NOW YOU DEFY MY ORDERS AND INSULT MY ROYAL PERSON.
YOUR ORDERS ARE INSANE! AS ARE YOU!
IF I AM TO SLAY A MONARCH TODAY, IT SHALL BE MAJESTOR T'KORR!
OR NOT.
SHRAKKK

IT'S AS YOU SAID, CHANCELLOR. THE STRONTIANS' VAUNTED POWER *FADES* THE MOMENT THEY DOUBT THEMSELVES.


CADETS, YOUR COMRADE DOUBTED BECAUSE SHE *KNEW* SHE HAD SHAMED HERSELF!
YOUR PEOPLE PRIZE HONOR AND DUTY AS THE *HIGHEST* OF VIRTUES. YOU SWORE *UNDYING LOYALTY* TO THE SHI'AR THRONE. TO OBEY *ANY ORDER* GIVEN YOU.

WELL, I ORDERED YOU TO *RETURN* TO YOUR MUDBALL OF A PLANET AND *KILL* YOUR COUNCIL OF ELDERS!
DO YOU INTEND TO HEED YOUR SOVEREIGN? OR WOULD YOU PREFER TO DO AS YOUR LATE FRIEND HERE, AND FOLLOW DISHONOR WITH *DEATH?*
DECIDE QUICKLY, FOR MY PATIENCE GROWS THIN!

WE...
...WE *OBEY*, MAJESTOR.

KALLARK, THIS IS ***WRONG.*** THE ELDERS ***RAISED*** US. THEY ARE AS MUCH FAMILY AS OUR OWN ***BLOOD.***

YES. AND THEY RAISED US WITH ***HONOR,*** HARRALD. TO HEED THE COMMANDS OF OUR MONARCH WITHOUT QUESTION.

LOOK. OUR FELLOWS FALL AROUND US.

THE GLADIATOR PROCESS HAS MADE US THE STRONGEST OF OUR KIND, YET THEIR INVULNERABILITY LEAVES THEM...

...BECAUSE THEY ***KNOW*** WHAT WE ARE DOING IS ***OBSCENE.***

PERHAPS THAT IS BEST, MY FRIEND.

FOR US ALL TO BE SLAIN IN BATTLE, RATHER THAN HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN OUR RULER AND OUR HOME. PERHAPS...

...NO. THOSE ARE THE MEWLINGS OF A COWARD.
MY FEELINGS ARE IRRELEVANT.
I HAVE SWORN TO OBEY OUR MAJESTOR...
KALLARK! DON'T!
THRAKK!
...AND I SHALL!
STAND ASIDE, GUARDS. I AM UNDER NO ORDERS TO HARM YOU.
ONLY THE ELDERS NEED DIE TODAY.
KALLARK--

--I AM SORRY, MY FRIEND, BUT I CANNOT ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN...
...EVEN IF I MUST TAKE YOUR LIFE.
YOU TALK AS IF YOU COULD, HARRALD.
BUT YOUR VOICE BETRAYS YOUR UNCERTAINTY.

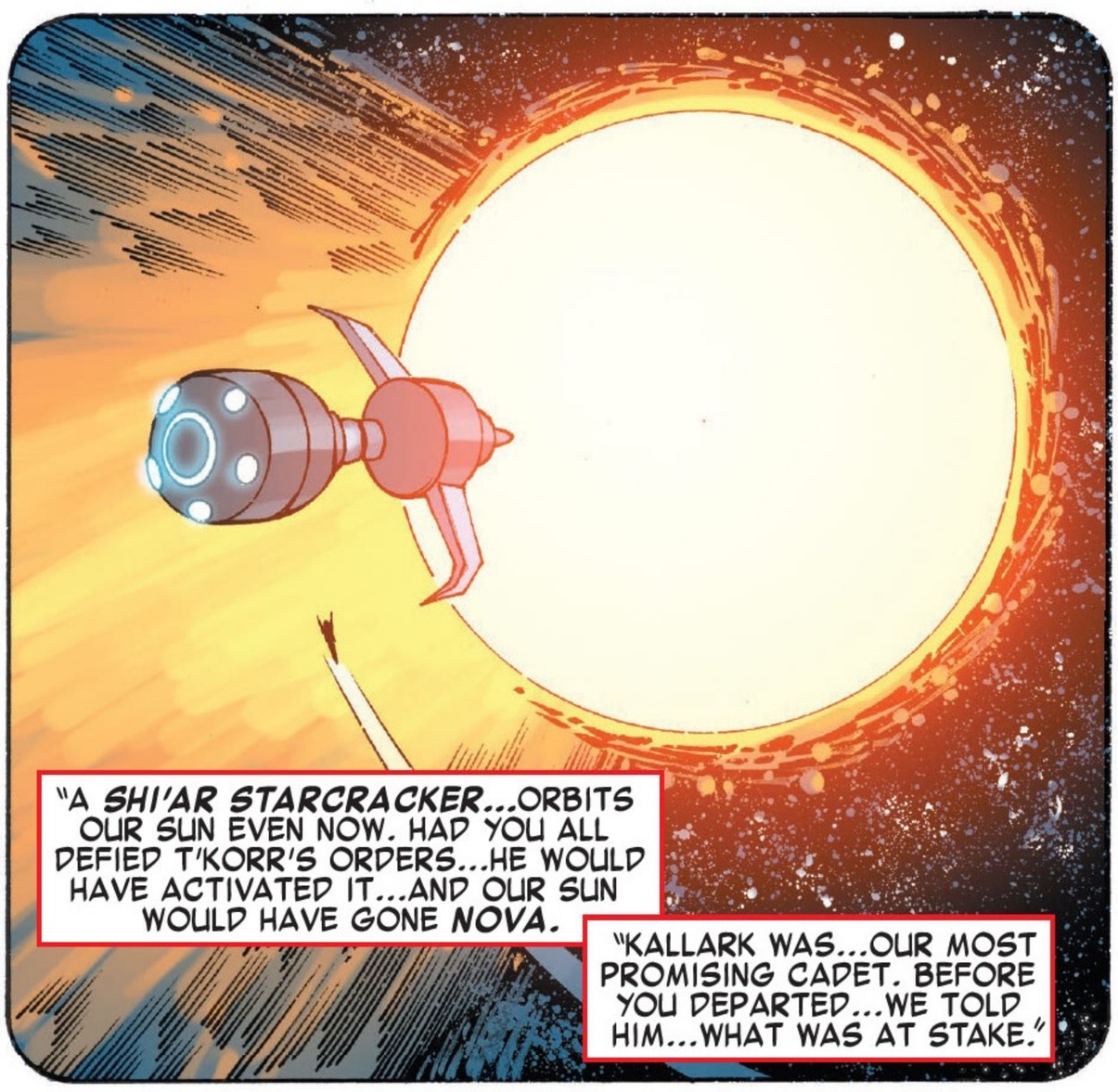
I HAVE NONE.
THRNCH

I DO AS I MUST.
SHRRAAKKK

ELDERS! NO!!
HOLD TIGHTLY TO LIFE. I SHALL HELP IF I CAN... OR, FAILING THAT, AVENGE YOU.

NO...MY SON.
KALLARK HAS FULFILLED...OUR FAITH IN HIM. AND SAVED... OUR WORLD.
W--WHAT--?

IT WAS...A TEST, MY SON. A TEST...OF OUR LOYALTY.
THE MAJESTOR FEARED...OUR POWER. SOUGHT ASSURANCE... THAT WE WOULD BE TRUE TO THE THRONE...ABOVE ALL. WE READILY AGREED... TO A BARGAIN.


"A SHI'AR STARCRACKER...ORBITS OUR SUN EVEN NOW. HAD YOU ALL DEFIED T'KORR'S ORDERS...HE WOULD HAVE ACTIVATED IT...AND OUR SUN WOULD HAVE GONE NOVA.
"KALLARK WAS...OUR MOST PROMISING CADET. BEFORE YOU DEPARTED...WE TOLD HIM...WHAT WAS AT STAKE."

"BUT...BUT ELDER, WHY? WHY NOT TELL ME? OR ANY OF THE REST OF US?"
"HARRALD...EVEN KNOWING, COULD YOU HAVE DONE WHAT WAS NECESSARY?
"OR WOULD IT HAVE BEEN...TOO TERRIBLE TO CONTEMPLATE? WOULD YOU INSTEAD HAVE CONSIDERED REBELLION... SECESSION...WAR?"

YOUR HESITATION... IS YOUR ANSWER.
WE COULD HAVE WON SUCH A WAR! WE HAVE THE POWER!
YES. BUT IT IS NOT...OUR WISH. NOT... OUR WAY.
ONLY KALLARK... COULD CARRY THE BURDEN... OF WHAT HE NOW FEELS. HE WILL SERVE THE IMPERIUM... WITH THE SAME HONOR AND DEDICATION...HE SHOWED TODAY.

ABOVE ALL...HE WILL...
...OBEY...

I CAN TELL FROM YOUR MANNER, KALLARK, THAT YOU ARE AWARE OF THE *TRUE* PURPOSE OF YOUR MISSION.

DESPITE WHAT YOU MAY THINK, I AM NOT A *CRUEL* MAN.

THE SAFETY OF COUNTLESS WORLDS IN THE SHI'AR EMPIRE DEPENDS ON ME. THERE CAN BE NO ROOM FOR DOUBT. IN A RULER... *OR* THOSE ON WHOM HE RELIES.

YOU HAVE PROVEN YOURSELF.

YOU SHALL *LEAD* MY NEW IMPERIAL GUARD. YOU SHALL BE ITS *PRAETOR.*

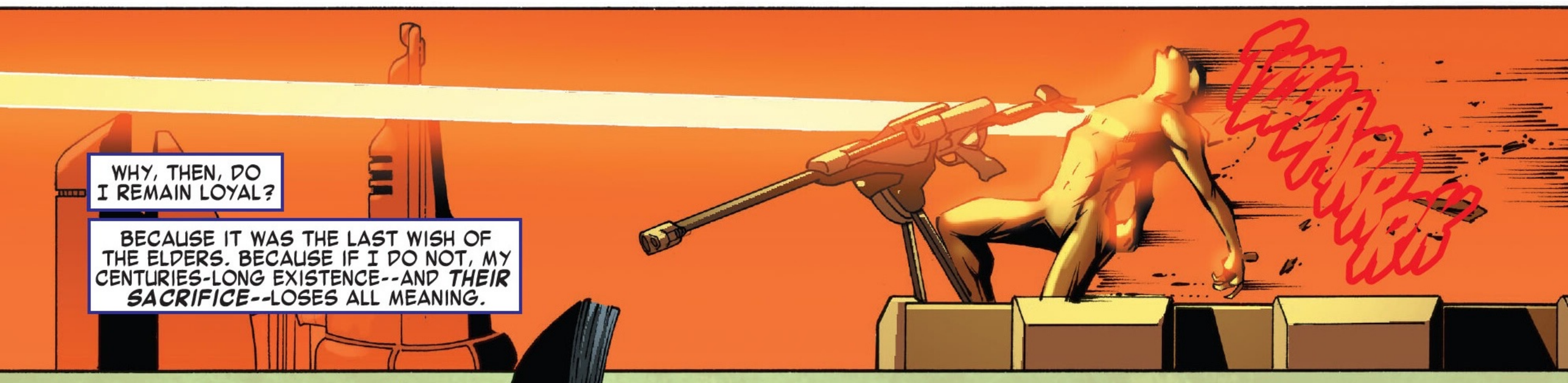
THROUGHOUT THE IMPERIUM, THE CITIZENS OF ALL THE SHI'AR WORLDS WILL PRAISE THE *HONOR*, THE *DUTY*, THE *COURAGE*...

"...OF *GLADIATOR.*"

THE PLANET THRNN. NOW.
T'KORR WAS A HARD MAN...BUT A GOOD LEADER. HE PUT HIS SUBJECTS BEFORE HIMSELF.
CAN I SAY THE SAME FOR VULCAN?

IT DOES NOT MATTER.
HE IS MY MAJESTOR.
KRNCH

MY PLANET IS NOW GONE. WITH BUT ONE EXCEPTION, I AM THE LAST OF MY KIND.


WHY, THEN, DO I REMAIN LOYAL?
BECAUSE IT WAS THE LAST WISH OF THE ELDERS. BECAUSE IF I DO NOT, MY CENTURIES-LONG EXISTENCE--AND THEIR SACRIFICE--LOSES ALL MEANING.

BECAUSE I AM GLADIATOR.
AND I HAVE SWORN TO SERVE.
END.

KEEP THE PRISONERS COVERED! WE NEED *REINFORCEMENTS* HERE!

THERE'S NO ONE TO SPARE, SIR! THEY'RE ATTACKING ALL SECTORS!

THE NEGATIVE ZONE. THE DRULAG LABOR CAMP.

FWHOOM

THE POWER GRID'S BLOWN! THE CHAINS ARE *USELESS!*

THEY FIGHT LIKE A *TRAINED ARMY.* BUT SO MANY DIFFERENT RACES...WHO COULD HAVE UNITED ALL THESE--

GODS OF THE VOID...CAN *ANNIHILUS* HAVE RETURNED?

ANNIHILUS IS A *ROTTING CORPSE.*

THE NEGATIVE ZONE HAS A *NEW* LORD...

BRAKACHOOM

BOW BEFORE KING BLASTAAR!

"KING" BLASTAAR? FAH.

YOUR NAME IS KNOWN TO ME, BRUTE. YOU ARE A *BARBARIAN.* A MINOR REGIONAL WARLORD WHOSE *OWN PEOPLE* ROSE UP AND TRIED TO *SLAY* HIM.

THIS IS NOTHING BUT A BAND OF *PIRATES.* THE SCUM OF THE UNIVERSE, SOMEHOW COME INTO POSSESSION OF POWERFUL WEAPONRY...

...BUT DOOMED TO ULTIMATE *FAILURE.* YOU MAY WIN VICTORIES HERE AND THERE. BUT *NO ONE* OF ANY CONSEQUENCE WILL FOLLOW YOU.

IT'S TRUE, MY PEOPLE TRIED TO KILL ME. AND THEY *FAILED.* AS HAS *EVERYONE ELSE.*

I DEFIED *ANNIHILUS* WHEN HE INVADED THE POSITIVE MATTER UNIVERSE. I FOUGHT THE *PHALANX'S* ATTEMPTED CONQUEST AS WELL.

THEY ARE GONE. *I STILL STAND.*

THERE ARE NONE LEFT TO OPPOSE ME. I HAVE THE BACKING OF THE *KREE EMPIRE.* THE NEGATIVE ZONE *WILL BE MINE.*

HAH! NOW I SEE. AN EMPIRE OF THE POSITIVE MATTER UNIVERSE *ARMED* YOUR BAND OF MISCREANTS AND SENT YOU BACK HERE TO RAMPAGE, LIKE THE SAVAGE BEASTS YOU ARE.

THEY VIEW YOU AS A *TOOL.* A SIMPLE-MINDED BRUTE WHO CAN PLUNGE THE NEGATIVE ZONE INTO *CHAOS* AND KEEP US FROM *THREATENING* THEM AGAIN.

NO DOUBT THEY EXPECT YOU WILL EVENTUALLY BE *KILLED,* SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF WHAT TO DO WITH THE UGLY *BARBARIAN* THEY WERE FORCED TO ALLY THEMSELVES WITH.

YOU ARE CLEARLY A LEARNED MAN. *ELOQUENT.* I AM *NOT.*

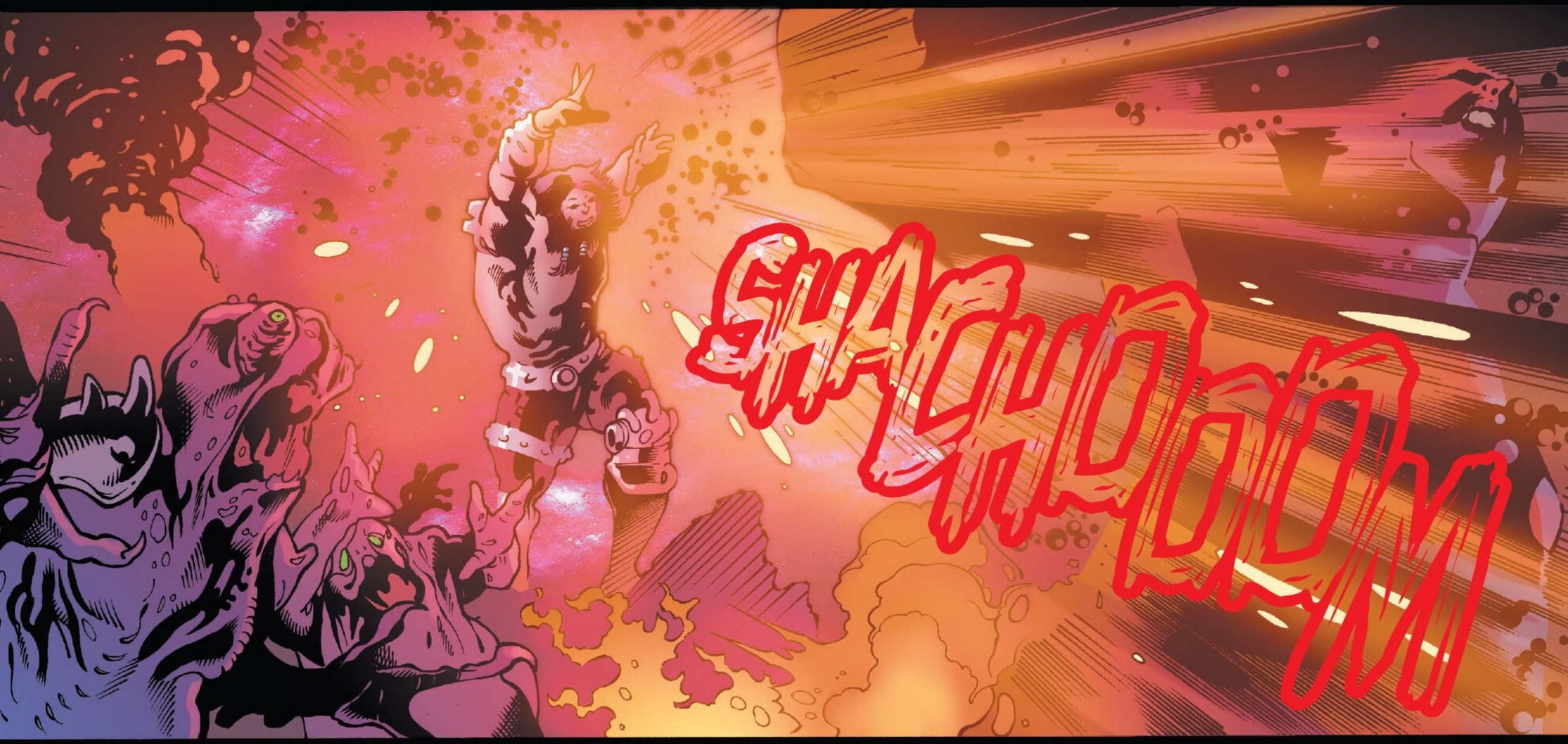
PLEASE PARDON THE INELEGANCE OF MY REBUTTAL.

AGGH!

BCHOOM

FREEDMEN, HEAR ME! THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARDS SPOKE THE TRUTH...
...FOR ALL THE GOOD IT DID HIM.
I AM NOT SOME BLUE-BLOODED ARISTOCRAT WHO FEELS ENTITLED TO COMMAND AN ARMY BECAUSE OF AN ACCIDENT OF BIRTH.
I AM LIKE YOU. WHAT I HAVE GAINED IN THIS LIFE, I TOOK...BECAUSE I WAS STRONG, AND I WAS WILLING TO KILL OR DIE TO ACQUIRE IT.
FOR THIS, I WAS LOOKED DOWN UPON BY THE SNEERING ELITES AND INTELLECTUALS. THOSE WHO TURNED TO ME FOR AID IN WAR FOUND ME AN EMBARRASSMENT IN PEACETIME.
THESE HYPOCRITES CONDEMNED ME FOR DOING OPENLY WHAT THEY DO BEHIND CLOSED DOORS, OR HIDDEN BEHIND THE PERFUMED VEILS OF "DIPLOMACY" AND "COMMERCE."
I KNOW THE INDIGNITIES AND INSULTS YOU'VE SUFFERED BECAUSE I HAVE SHARED THEM.
EXILE. IMPRISONMENT. REGARDED AS LITTLE BETTER THAN DOGS.
WELL, THE DOGS ARE ABOUT TO HAVE THEIR DAY!
JOIN ME, AND I SHALL LEAD YOU TO VICTORY. THOSE WHO ONCE CAST YOU OUT WILL KNEEL BEFORE YOU.
JOIN ME, AND OUR ARMY WILL GROW VAST AND STRONG. WE SHALL RULE THE NEGATIVE ZONE!
ARE YOU WITH ME?!

I AM NOT.
I'VE BEEN BREAKING ROCKS HERE FOR THIRTY ROTATIONS. I'M OFF TO FIND SOME EXPENSIVE DRINKS AND CHEAP WOMEN.


SWOOM

I ASK AGAIN.
ARE YOU WITH ME?!!

HAIL KING BLASTAAR!

SOME TIME LATER.
THE PLANET BALUUR.
BLASTAAR'S HOMEWORLD.

THIS MUST NOT BE!
IN THE TIME SINCE BLASTAAR WAS DEPOSED, WE HAVE BUILT BALUUR FROM A BARBARIC BACKWATER INTO A PLACE OF SCIENCE. OF LEARNING. OF INTELLECTUAL ACHIEVEMENT.
I REFUSE TO LET THAT... THAT ANIMAL DRAG US DOWN INTO THE MUD AGAIN.
MY KING, PLEASE! REMAIN IN THE SAFETY OF THE PALACE!

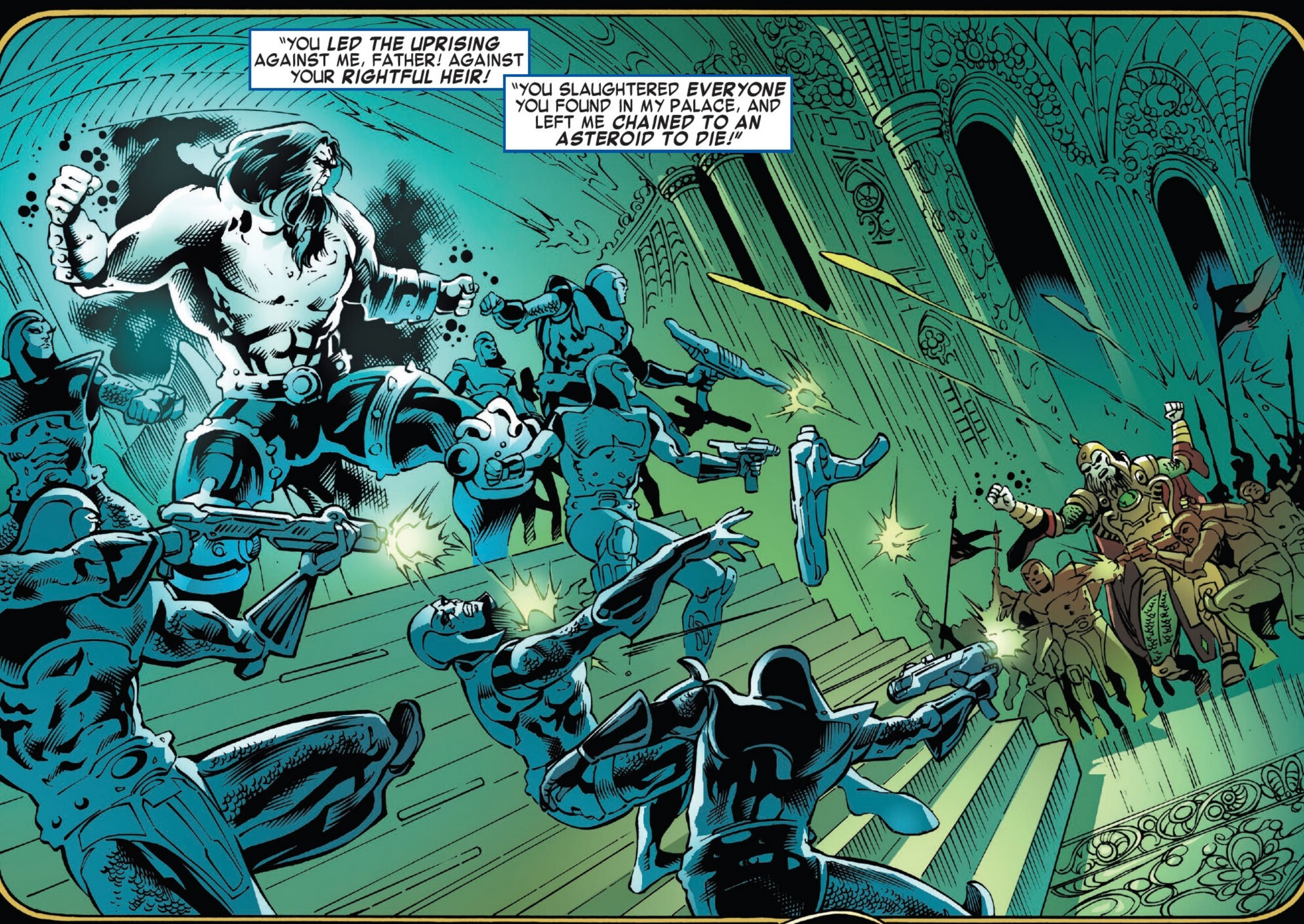
MOST OF OUR FLEET WAS DESTROYED ON THE GROUND. OUR DEFENSES HAVE BEEN TARGETED WITH RUTHLESS PRECISION. WE CANNOT PROPERLY PROTECT YOU.
PROTECT ME? I AM KING! IT IS I WHO SHOULD PROTECT MY PEOPLE...

...AND I SHALL!
SLASH!

BLASTAAR! YOUR BLOODLUST THREATENS TO TEAR BALUUR ASUNDER!
WHATEVER HATE YOU HAVE FOR US--FOR ME-- IT SHOULD NOT EXTEND TO OUR MUTUAL HOME. LET US RESOLVE THIS ANOTHER WAY.
I CHALLENGE YOU TO SINGLE COMBAT. IF YOU ARE THE VICTOR, MY PEOPLE WILL SUBMIT. BUT IF I WIN, YOUR ARMY MUST LAY DOWN THEIR ARMS AND DISPERSE.
WHAT SAY YOU?
I ACCEPT, OF COURSE.
HOW CAN I REFUSE MY HONORED FATHER?

TO THE DEATH, THEN!
TO SAVE MY PEOPLE, I SHALL KILL MY OWN SON!
NO, FATHER. I WILL SLAY YOU. NOT FOR VICTORY...
...BUT BECAUSE YOU HAVE IT COMING!
VICTORY TO KING GRONDAAR!
SLAUGHTER THE OLD MAN, KING BLASTAAR!

YOU'VE GROWN OVERCONFIDENT, BLASTAAR. UNDERSTANDABLY SO.
YOU'VE NEVER HAD TO FACE A FOE WITH OUR FAMILY'S UNIQUE POWER.
KKROMM!
BUT I HAD IT THIRTY YEARS BEFORE YOU WERE BORN!
BWATOOM!
I TAUGHT YOU EVERYTHING YOU KNOW!
YES...INCLUDING TREACHERY.


"YOU LED THE UPRISING AGAINST ME, FATHER! AGAINST YOUR RIGHTFUL HEIR!
"YOU SLAUGHTERED EVERYONE YOU FOUND IN MY PALACE, AND LEFT ME CHAINED TO AN ASTEROID TO DIE!"

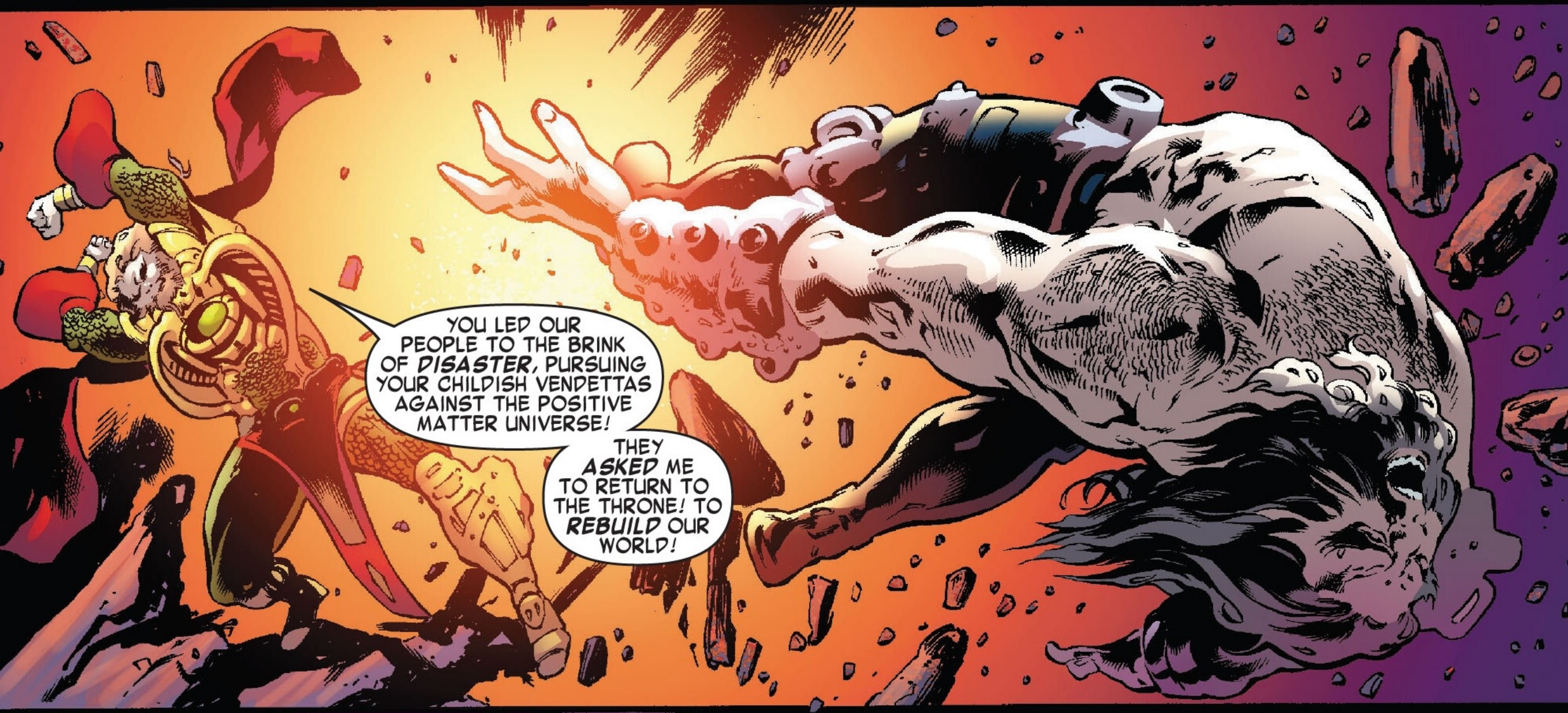
I LED THE REBELLION BECAUSE OUR PEOPLE BEGGED ME TO!
YOU WERE A DESPOT! ENRICHING YOURSELF WHILE BALUUR STARVED! LEADING US INTO ONE MAD WAR AFTER ANOTHER!

MY ONLY MISTAKES--
UNGH!
--WERE NOT KILLING YOU ON THE SPOT, OUT OF FOOLISH SENTIMENTALITY--
--AND ALLOWING ONE OUTSIDE OUR ROYAL BLOODLINE TO ASSUME THE THRONE...OUT OF SHAME FOR WHAT MY FLESH AND BLOOD HAD DONE!
KRAK

YES. YOUR HAND-PICKED SUCCESSOR...A *WEAKLING* AND A *COWARD*.
WHEN I RETURNED, OUR PEOPLE WELCOMED ME WITH *OPEN ARMS!*

UNDERSTANDABLY. THEY HAD BEEN BESIEGED BY *INVADERS*, AND CRAVED A *STRONG HAND* TO PROTECT THEM.

NOT REALIZING THAT *STRENGTH WITHOUT WISDOM* IS THE *WORST KIND OF WEAKNESS!*
RAAGH!
BKRAMMM


YOU LED OUR PEOPLE TO THE BRINK OF *DISASTER*, PURSUING YOUR CHILDISH VENDETTAS AGAINST THE POSITIVE MATTER UNIVERSE!
THEY *ASKED* ME TO RETURN TO THE THRONE! TO *REBUILD* OUR WORLD!

LOOK AROUND YOU! IN A SHORT TIME BALUUR HAS BECOME A *PARADISE!* A PLACE OF ART, SCIENCE, AND LEARNING!
YOU WILL NOT TAKE THAT FROM US!

YOU ARE *HATED* HERE. OUR PEOPLE WANT YOU PUT DOWN LIKE A *WILD BEAST.*
BUT YOU ARE STILL OF MY *BLOOD.* AND I AM PREPARED TO BE MERCIFUL.
YIELD. RENOUNCE YOUR FOOLISH DREAMS OF CONQUEST AND I MAY PERSUADE THEM TO IMPRISON YOU FOR LIFE, RATHER THAN KILL YOU.

YIELD?
I CHOSE THE PATH OF CONQUEST OVER MY *WIFE.* MY *LAST SURVIVING SON.* AND I *CARED* FOR THEM.
SURRENDER TO A FATHER I *HATE?*

NEVER!!
SHRACHOOOM!
YOU HAVE WON. AND WE SHALL KEEP OUR WORD.
WE PLEDGE OURSELVES TO YOUR SERVICE... KING BLASTAAR.
DO YOU, NOW?

I SPIT ON YOUR PLEDGE.

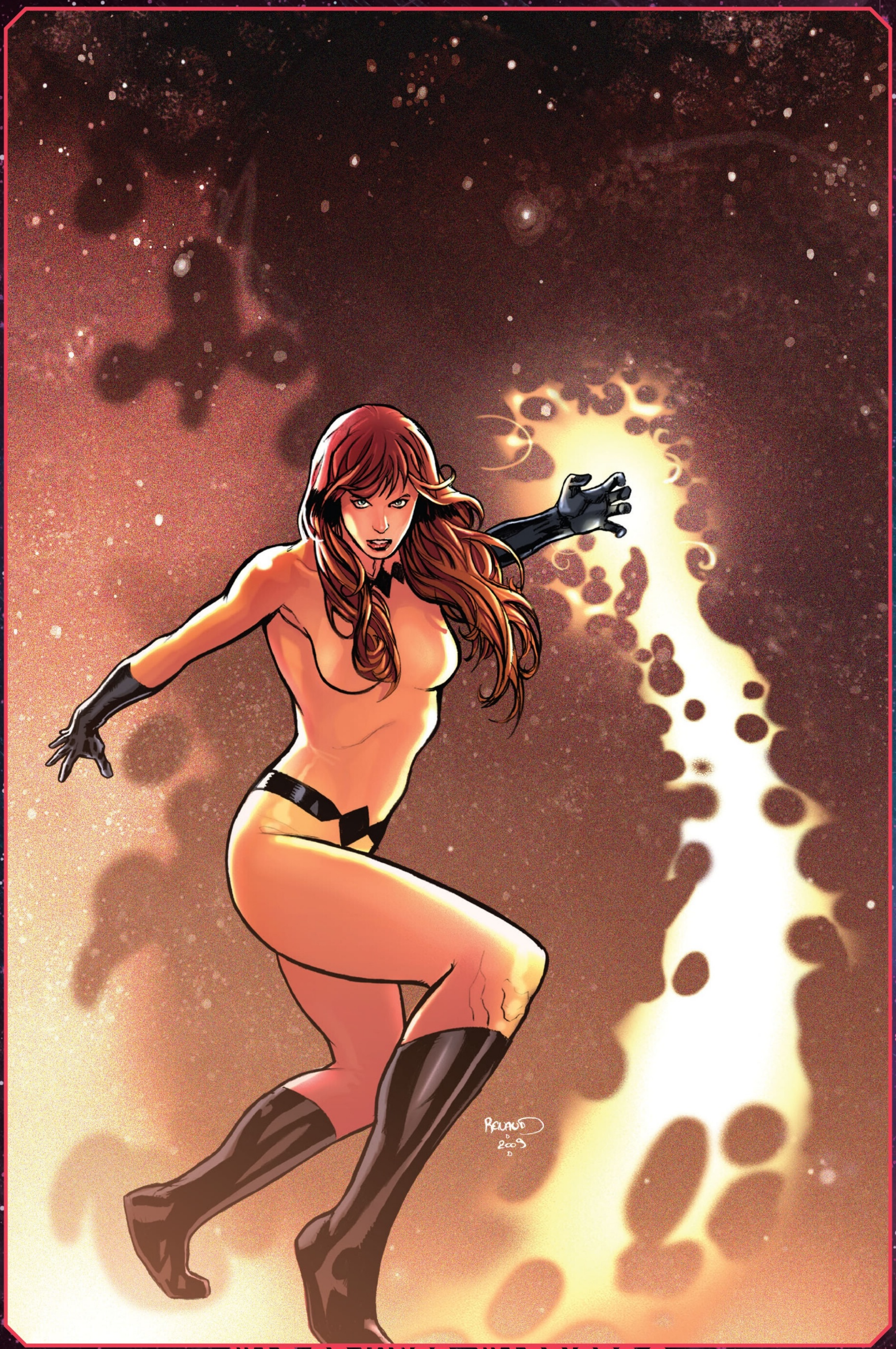
ALL MY LIFE, I HAVE SOUGHT THE ACCEPTANCE OF MY PEOPLE. BY FORCE, IF THAT WAS THE ONLY MEANS AVAILABLE.
AND IN RETURN, YOU HAVE GIVEN ME BETRAYAL.

NOW, I ASK BUT ONE THING FROM YOU.
THAT YOU SUFFER.

BALUUR SHALL BE A HEADQUARTERS FOR MY ARMY. AND ITS PEOPLE, THEIR SERVANTS.
YOU, WHO THOUGHT YOURSELVES SO FAR ABOVE BRUTES LIKE US, SHALL NOW POLISH OUR BOOTS. LIVE AND DIE AT OUR WHIMS.

IS IT NOT AS I PROMISED, MEN? I, WHO HAD BEEN CAST OUT OF MY HOME, NOW RULE IT. AS SHALL YOU ALL.
OUR CONQUEST HAS JUST BEGUN. WE HAVE BEEN UNDER-ESTIMATED FOR THE LAST TIME. AND WE SHALL PROVE IT...
...BY BRINGING THE NEGATIVE ZONE TO ITS KNEES!

BUT IT WILL NOT END THERE.
THE ELITES OF THE POSITIVE MATTER UNIVERSE THOUGHT THEY COULD USE BLASTAAR. LIKE SOME UNTHINKING TOOL...A WEAPON.
THEY'LL SOON FIND OUT THAT A WEAPON...
...CAN POINT BOTH WAYS!
END.



WAR OF KINGS: WARRIORS 2

HALA, THE KREE HOMEWORLD.
ONE WEEK BEFORE THE MARRIAGE OF CRYSTAL TO RONAN THE ACCUSER.

MY FAMILY AND I HAVE BEEN LIVING HERE EVER SINCE BLACK BOLT TOOK A MORE PROACTIVE STANCE CONCERNING THE FUTURE OF THE INHUMANS.

HE TOOK CONTROL OF THE WEAKENED KREE EMPIRE, AND MOVED OUR ENTIRE CITY OF ATTILAN TO HALA.

GROWING PAINS

MEDUSA IS BLACK BOLT'S WIFE. SHE'S ALSO HIS *VOICE*.
THIS IS THE SECOND SUCH TERRORIST ATTACK. A *THIRD* WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.
OF COURSE WE NEED TO STOP THEM, BUT LET'S NOT LOSE ALL PERSPECTIVE. THEY BLEW UP SOME STATUES. BEFORE THAT, THEY WRECKED AN EMPTY TRANSPORT SHIP.
BUT DON'T FORGET THAT THEY HAVEN'T KILLED OR EVEN *HARMED* ANYONE.
WHEN SHE SPEAKS, IT'S AS THE LEADER OF THE INHUMANS ROYAL FAMILY, AND NOW, THE ENTIRE KREE EMPIRE...BUT I JUST HEAR MY *OLDER SISTER*.
YOU NEED TO TAKE THIS *SERIOUSLY*, CRYSTAL. WE *CANNOT* ALLOW THESE ACTIONS TO ESCALATE.
I *AM* TAKING IT SERIOUSLY, I JUS--
PERHAPS ALL THE TIME YOU'VE SPENT ON EARTH, AMONG *HUMANS* HA--

I...I APOLOGIZE, MY LORD.

BEFORE BLACK BOLT TOOK COMMAND OF THE KREE, THEY WERE LED BY ***RONAN THE ACCUSER***, A CELEBRATED KREE WARRIOR.

WHEN ASKED WHAT HE WANTED IN RETURN FOR COOPERATING WITH US, RONAN REQUESTED MY HAND IN MARRIAGE. MEDUSA AGREED A LITTLE TOO QUICKLY FOR MY TASTE.

IF I MAY INTERJECT, WE'RE DEALING WITH A SMALL SUBSET OF THE KREE POPULATION.

THIS FACTION IS NOT HAPPY ABOUT LIVING UNDER INHUMAN RULE AND IT IS THE KREE'S NATURE TO FIGHT BACK.

IF IT PLEASES YOU, I WILL CONDUCT AN INVESTIGATION AND DEAL WITH THE PERPETRATORS.

BUT I REALIZED OUR UNION IS AN IMPORTANT SYMBOL IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE KREE AND THE INHUMANS, SO IT'S A SACRIFICE I'VE COME TO RELUCTANTLY ACCEPT.

WAIT... WHILE LUNA IS ON HER CLASS TRIP...LET ME LOOK INTO IT.

WHY WOULD ***YOU*** WANT THIS TASK, SISTER? WITH YOUR IMPENDING NUPTIALS, DON'T YOU HAVE MORE ***PRESSING*** CONCERNS?

THAT'S ***WHY*** I WANT TO DO THIS. ONCE I MARRY RONAN, I SUPPOSE THE KREE WILL LOOK TO ME AS SOMETHING OF AN AMBASSADOR BETWEEN OUR TWO RACES.

I THINK IT'LL SEND A CLEAR MESSAGE IF I TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS.

BLACK BOLT THINKS THAT IS A NOBLE GESTURE ON YOUR PART. THE JOB IS YOURS.

MEDUSA LEAVES IT AT THAT, BUT I CAN JUST HEAR HER ADDING, "DON'T SCREW IT UP."

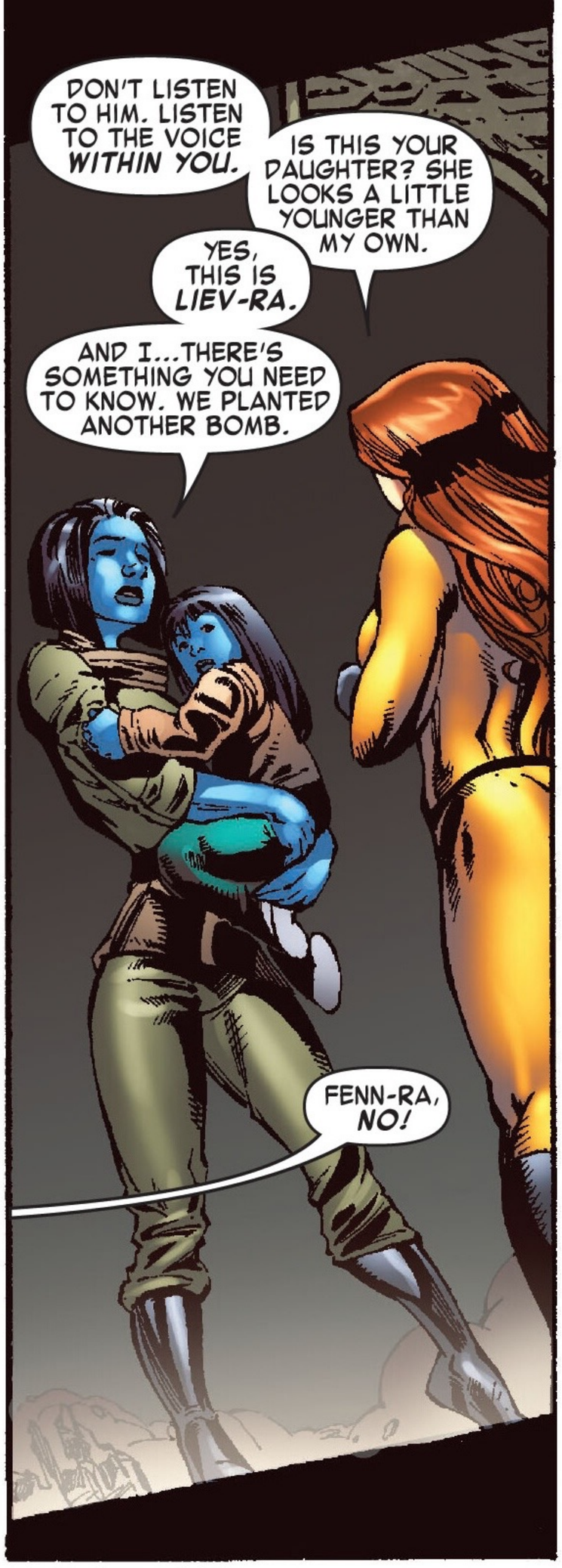
AN HOUR LATER...
WHATEVER KIND OF EXPLOSIVE THE BOMBERS UTILIZED, IT DIDN'T LEAVE BEHIND ANY COMPONENTS OR RESIDUE THAT AUTHORITIES COULD USE TO TRACK THEM DOWN.
BUT THEN I NOTICE SOMETHING...SOMETHING PERHAPS THAT ONLY I CAN UTILIZE.
FOOTPRINTS NEAR THE BASE OF THE STATUE.
AND MY CONTROL OVER THE FOUR BASIC ELEMENTS LETS ME ISOLATE THEM.
THAT'S HOW I KNOW THERE'S SOIL PRESENT THAT'S NOT INDIGENOUS TO THIS PARK.
AND I'LL BET ANYTHING IT WAS FROM THE BOOTS OF WHOEVER PLANTED THE BOMB...

...WHICH MEANS IT CAN LEAD ME TO THEM.
A QUICK COMPARISON REVEALS THAT THE SOIL IS AN EXACT MATCH FOR THE SOIL IN THIS GARDEN.
KNOCK KNOCK
YES...?
PLEASE FORGIVE MY INTRUSION. I AM CRYSTAL AMAQUELIN MAXIMOFF, OF THE INHUMANS' ROYAL FAMILY.
I THINK YOU KNOW WHY I'M HERE.
I AM FENN-RA.
PLEASE... COME IN.

WHILE WE WERE TALKING, I USED MY CONTROL OF THE AIR TO DETECT FIVE ADDITIONAL SETS OF LUNGS IN THE ROOM.
THEY WERE TAKING SHORT, FAST BREATHS, WHICH MEANS THEY WERE EXCITED...READY TO ATTACK.
FZAM
FZAM
WHETHER YOU CHOOSE TO BELIEVE IT, I'M NOT HERE TO FIGHT YOU!
WOOMPH
LOOK, WE UNDERSTAND YOU'RE UPSET ABOUT BLACK BOLT TAKING OVER AS YOUR LEADER.
BUT THINK ABOUT IT. AGES AGO, THE INHUMANS WERE CREATED BY THE KREE WITH THE SOLE PURPOSE OF BEING USED AS WEAPONS TO DEFEAT THE SKRULLS.
WELL, GUESS WHAT? MISSION ACCOMPLISHED. WE DEFEATED THEM.
AND SO YOU ASSUME YOUR "PRIZE" IS TO RULE THE MIGHTY KREE EMPIRE?
FZAM

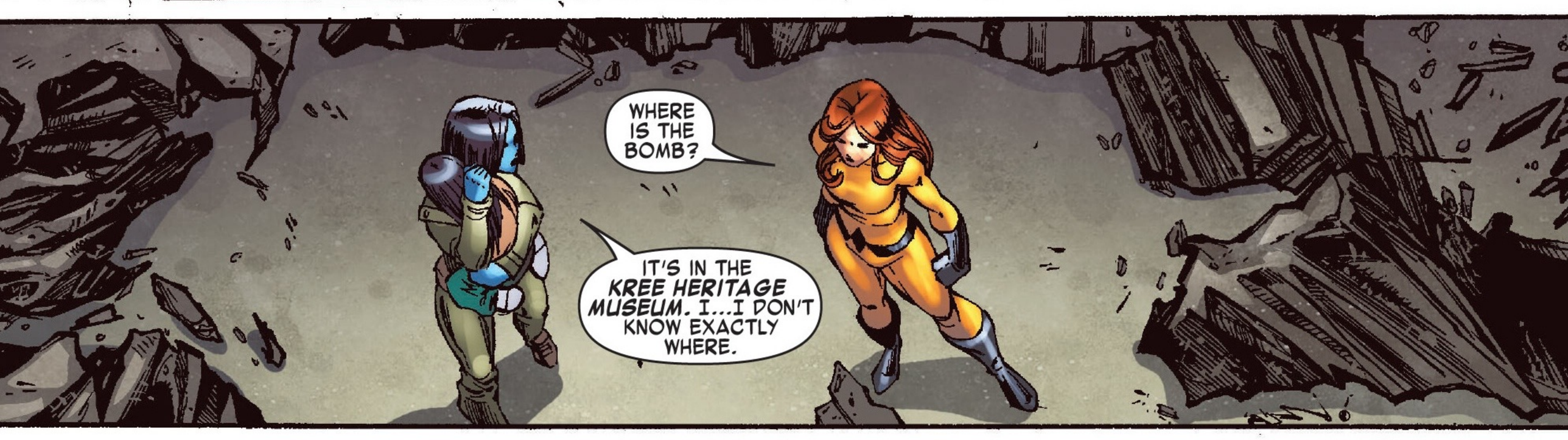
LEADING THE KREE ISN'T A "PRIZE." IT'S A RESPONSIBILITY! ONE THAT BLACK BOLT DOES NOT TAKE LIGHTLY.
THIS IS AN ALLIANCE BETWEEN OUR TWO SOCIETIES. INDIVIDUALLY, WE ARE BOTH VULNERABLE TO ATTACK, BUT TOGETHER, WE ARE UNBEATABLE.
WE WILL NEVER SUBMIT TO BLACK BOLT'S RULE!
FZAM
KRDM
I KEEP HEARING YOU USE THE WORD "RULE."
BLACK BOLT DOESN'T WANT TO RULE YOU, HE WANTS TO LEAD YOU.
THERE'S A BIG DIFFERENCE.
THIS IS A DIFFICULT ADJUSTMENT FOR ALL OF US, BUT IF YOU JUST GIVE IT A CHANCE, YOU'LL SEE THAT THE KREE EMPIRE--UNDER BLACK BOLT'S LEADERSHIP--IS AT THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA OF PROSPERITY.
I COULD HAVE YOU ARRESTED AND EXECUTED, BUT THERE IS ANOTHER WAY.
I WAS ASKED BY BLACK BOLT TO DEAL WITH THE ANTI-INHUMAN PROTESTS. I'D LIKE VERY MUCH TO TELL HIM THAT THERE WILL BE NO MORE.
CAN I TELL HIM THAT?

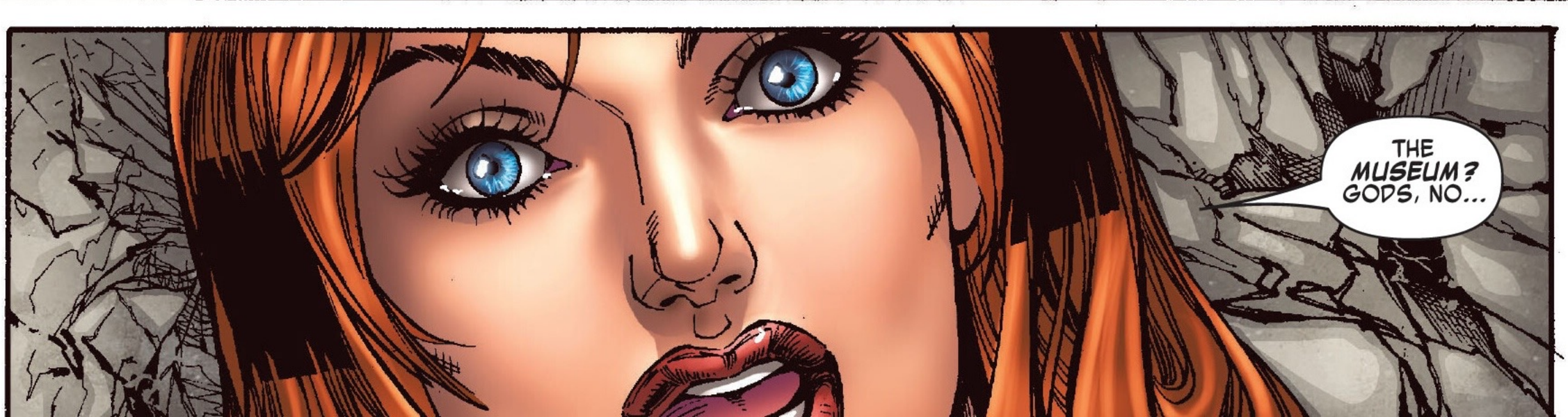
I WANT TO BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU'VE SAID TODAY.
SILENCE, FENN-RA! DO NOT TALK TO THE INHUMAN!


DON'T LISTEN TO HIM. LISTEN TO THE VOICE WITHIN YOU.
IS THIS YOUR DAUGHTER? SHE LOOKS A LITTLE YOUNGER THAN MY OWN.
YES, THIS IS LIEV-RA.
AND I...THERE'S SOMETHING YOU NEED TO KNOW. WE PLANTED ANOTHER BOMB.
FENN-RA, NO!

IGNORE HIM. TALK TO ME. TELL ME ABOUT THE BOMB. CAN YOU DEACTIVATE IT?

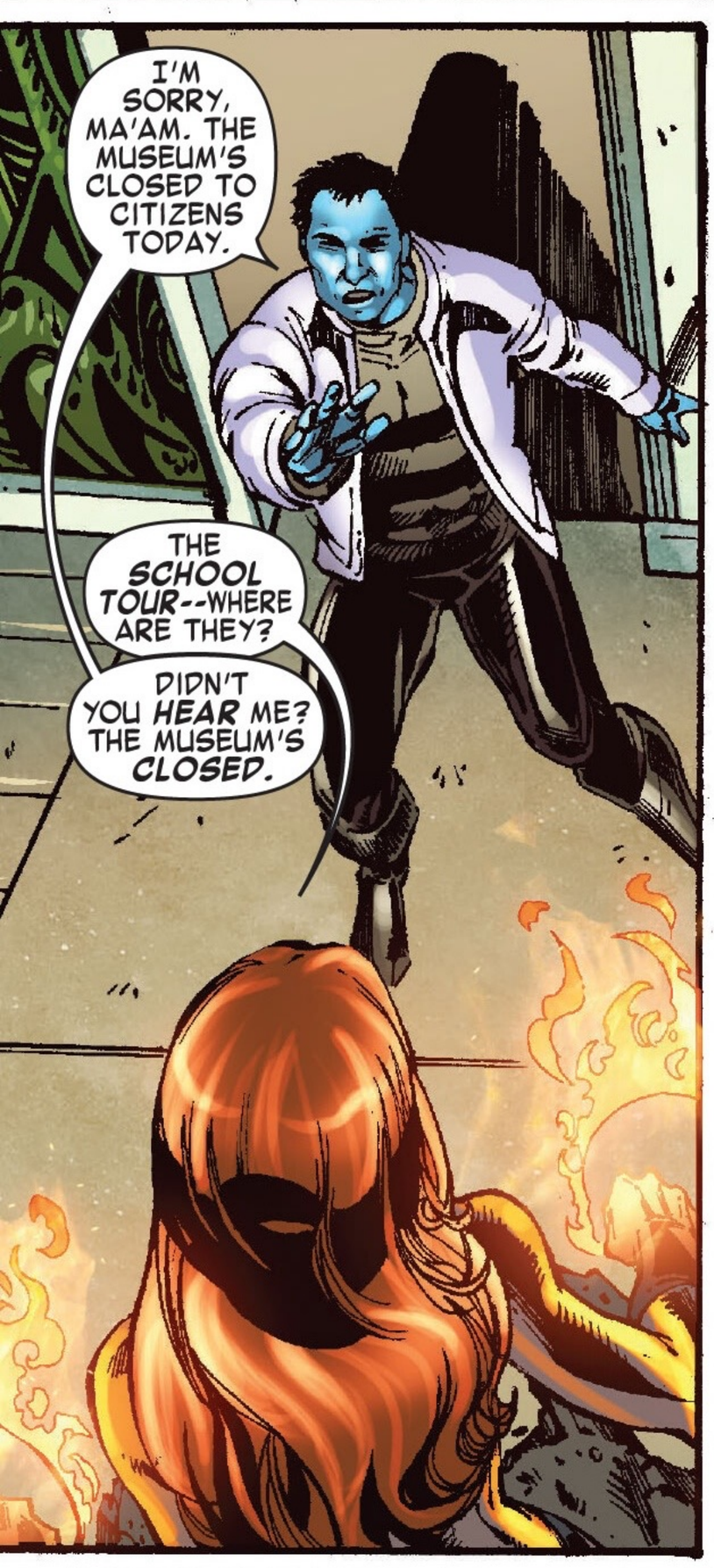
NO, THE REMOTE DETONATOR WAS DAMAGED IN OUR FIGHTING.

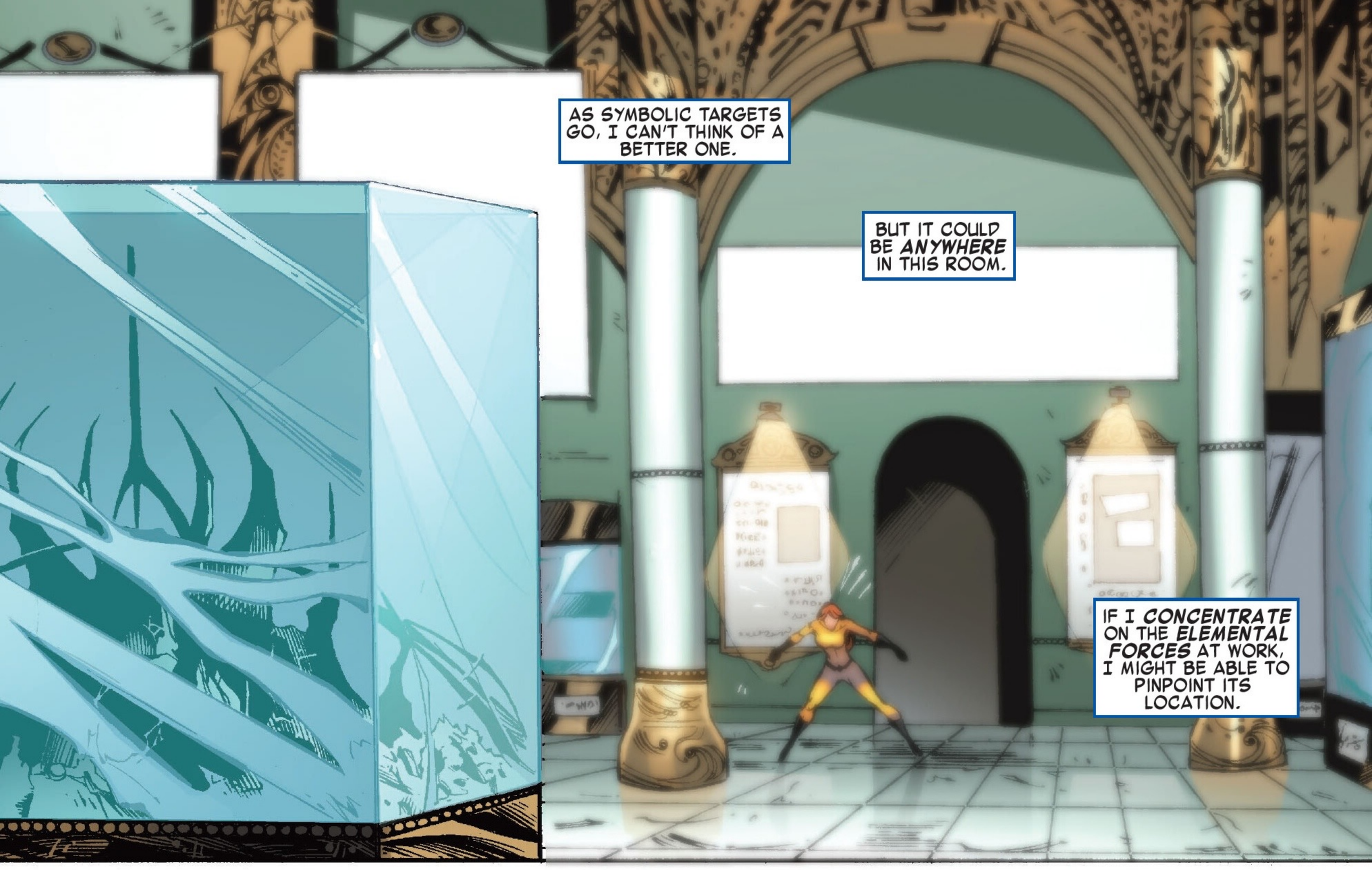

WHERE IS THE BOMB?
IT'S IN THE KREE HERITAGE MUSEUM. I...I DON'T KNOW EXACTLY WHERE.


THE MUSEUM? GODS, NO...

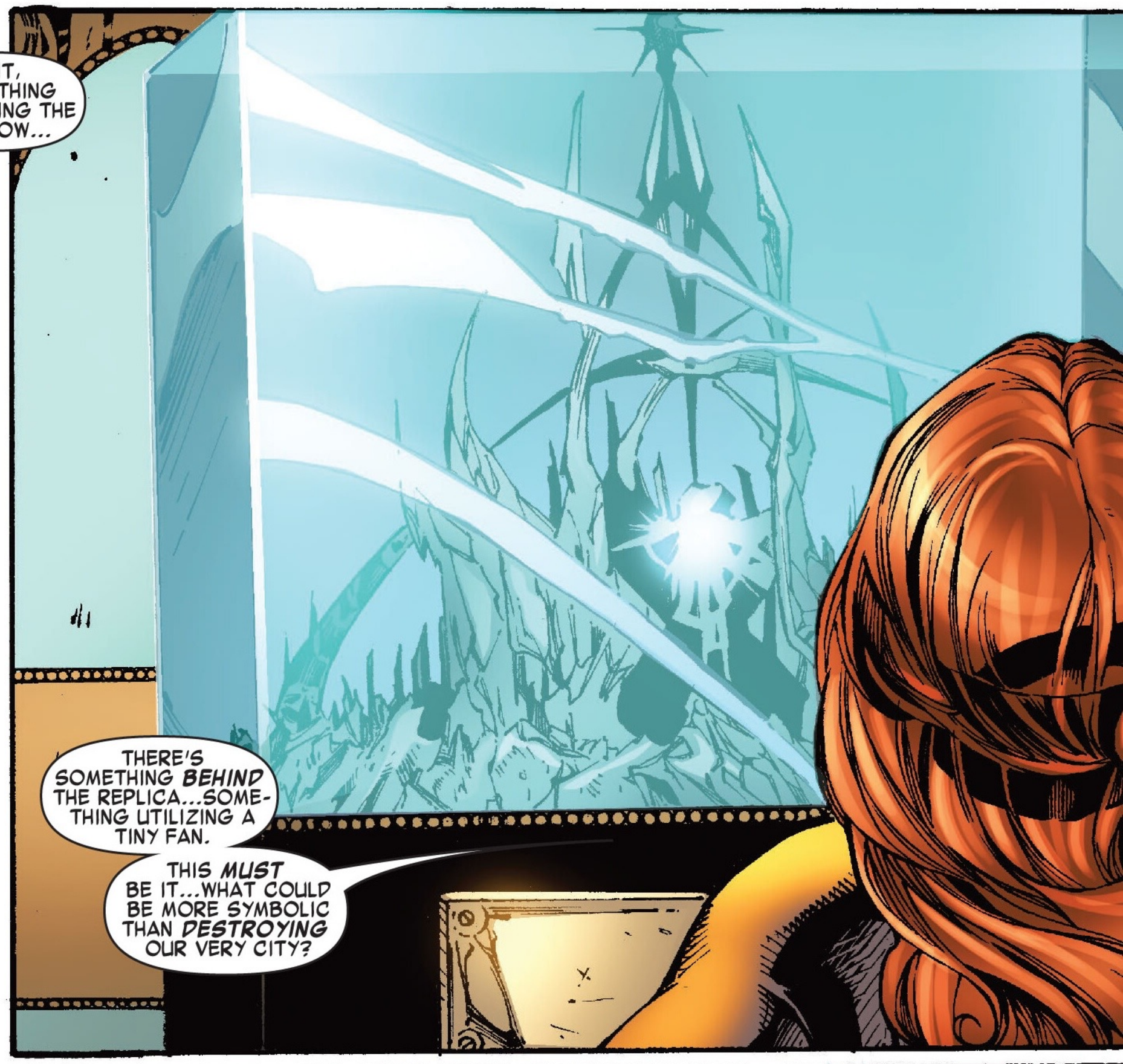
"...MY DAUGHTER'S THERE!"

THE KREE HERITAGE MUSEUM.

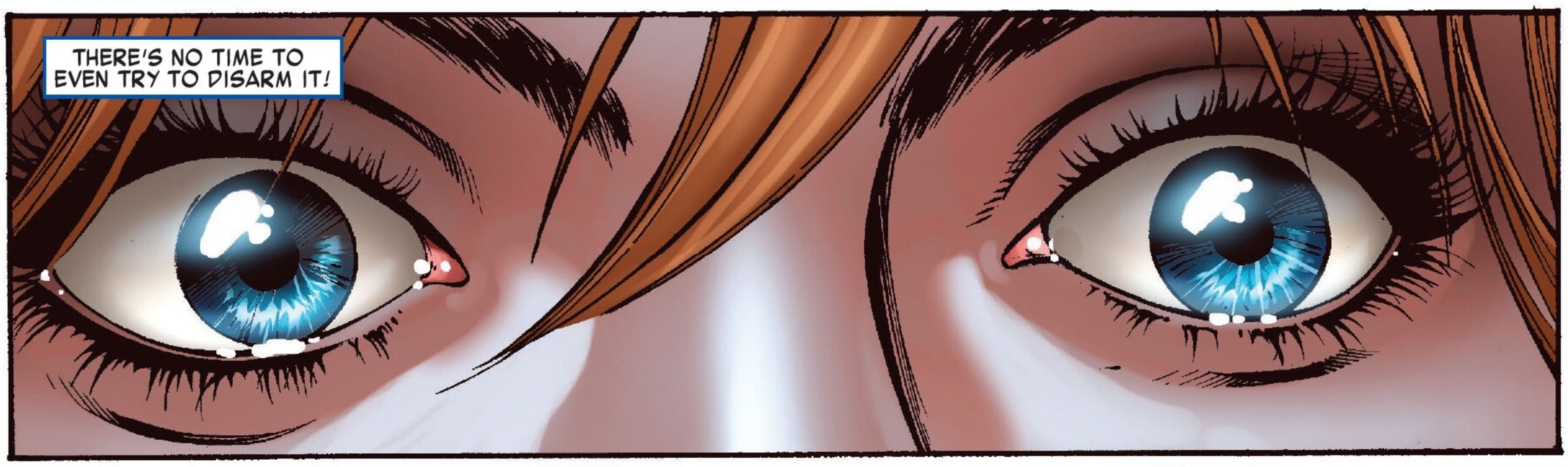


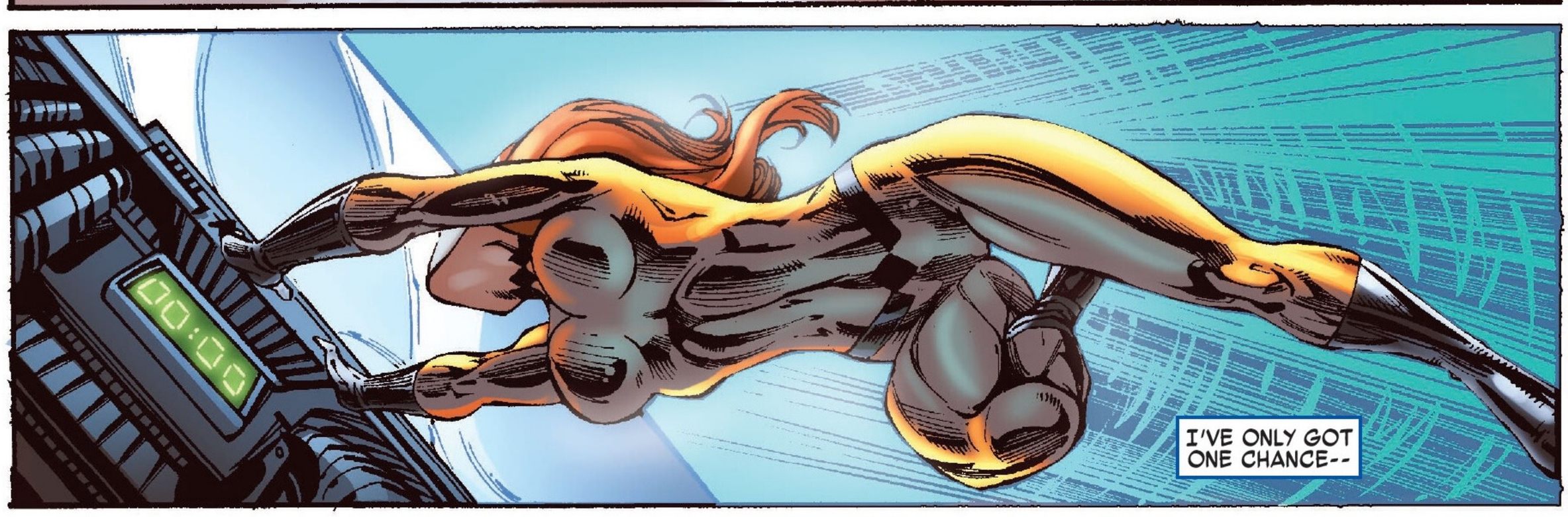

AS SYMBOLIC TARGETS GO, I CAN'T THINK OF A BETTER ONE.
BUT IT COULD BE *ANYWHERE* IN THIS ROOM.
IF I *CONCENTRATE* ON THE *ELEMENTAL FORCES* AT WORK, I MIGHT BE ABLE TO PINPOINT ITS LOCATION.

WAIT, SOMETHING DISTURBING THE AIRFLOW...


THERE'S SOMETHING *BEHIND* THE REPLICA...SOMETHING UTILIZING A TINY FAN.
THIS *MUST* BE IT...WHAT COULD BE MORE SYMBOLIC THAN *DESTROYING* OUR VERY CITY?

OH, GODS. THIS ONE'S BIGGER THAN THE BOMB THEY USED IN THE PARK!
BIG ENOUGH TO TAKE OUT THE ENTIRE MUSEUM!

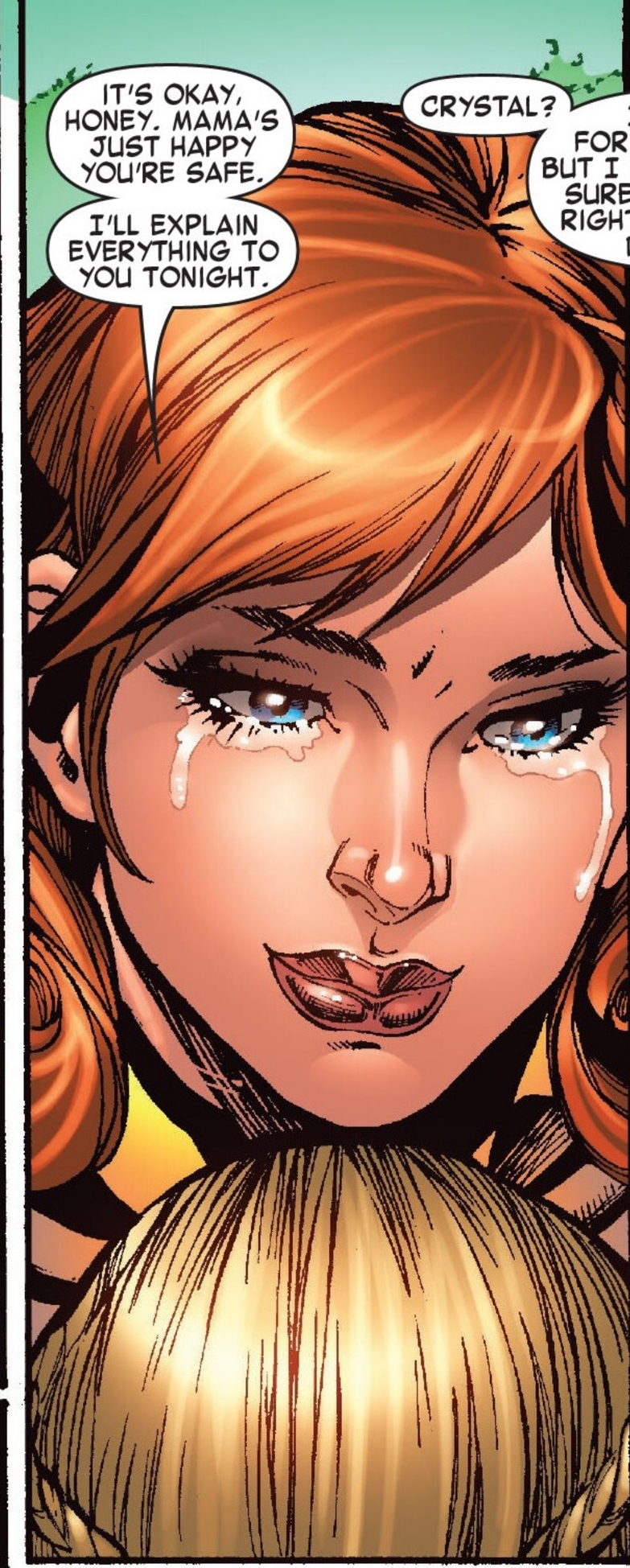

THERE'S NO TIME TO EVEN TRY TO DISARM IT!


00:00
I'VE ONLY GOT ONE CHANCE--

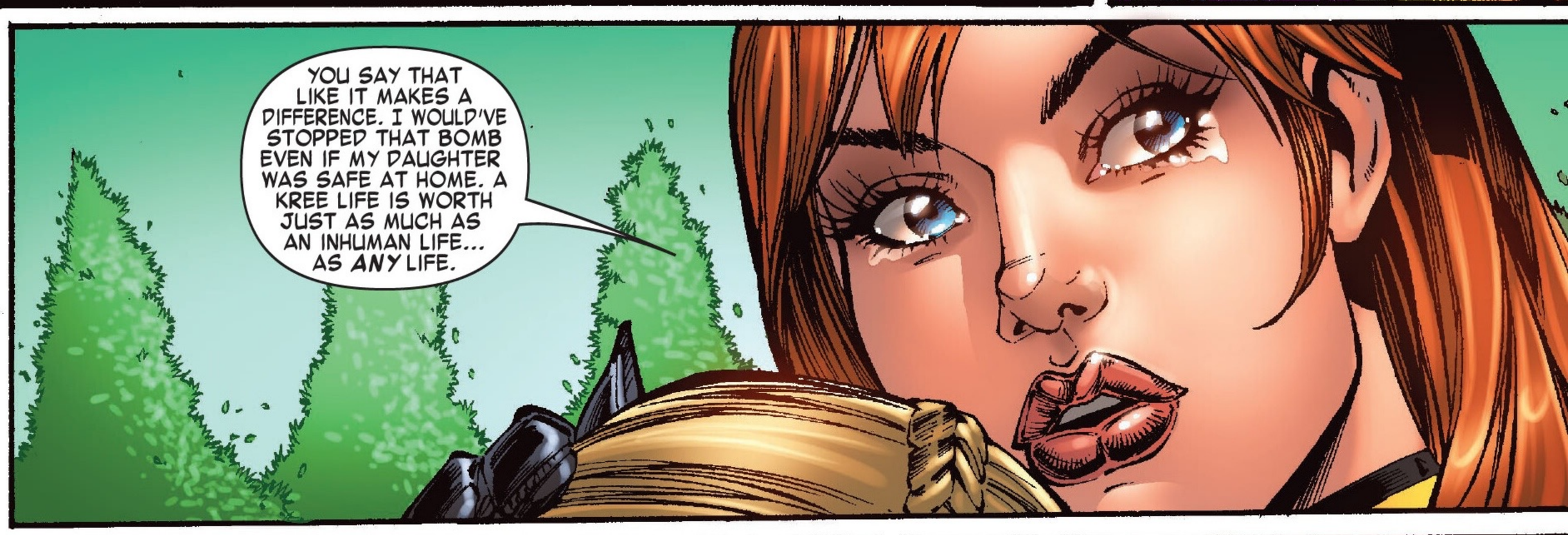
BWA-KKOOOM

HOLY HALA, WHAT WAS THAT?!
I DON'T KNOW, I-- LOOK!
WHAT HAPPENED IN HERE?
LOOK OUT, IT'S--
KKRAKKK
IS...IS EVERYBODY OKAY?

LUNA! OH, BABY, I'M SO HAPPY TO SEE YOU!
MAMA! THEY MADE US HURRY OUT OF THE MUSEUM AND NO ONE TOLD US WHAT WAS HAPPENING!
WHAT'S WRONG? WHY ARE YOU CRYING?


IT'S OKAY, HONEY. MAMA'S JUST HAPPY YOU'RE SAFE.
I'LL EXPLAIN EVERYTHING TO YOU TONIGHT.

CRYSTAL?
I'M SORRY FOR INTERRUPTING, BUT I WANTED TO MAKE SURE YOU WERE ALL RIGHT. IS THIS YOUR DAUGHTER?
YES, THIS IS LUNA.
LUNA, THIS IS FENN-RA AND HER DAUGHTER, LIEV-RA.
I JUST WANTED TO THANK YOU. THERE WERE KREE CHILDREN IN THAT MUSEUM IN ADDITION TO YOUR DAUGHTER.


YOU SAY THAT LIKE IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE. I WOULD'VE STOPPED THAT BOMB EVEN IF MY DAUGHTER WAS SAFE AT HOME. A KREE LIFE IS WORTH JUST AS MUCH AS AN INHUMAN LIFE... AS ANY LIFE.

I DIDN'T REALIZE YOU FELT THAT WAY. I THINK MY FRIENDS ASSUME YOU AND YOUR FAMILY FEEL... DIFFERENTLY.
I DON'T KNOW IF IT WILL HELP, BUT I'M GOING TO TRY TO CORRECT THEIR MISGUIDED OPINIONS.

THERE'S A LOT OF WORK TO BE DONE ON BOTH SIDES...BUT THAT SOUNDS LIKE A GREAT PLACE TO START.

LATER, I GET TO REPORT IN TO HER MAJESTY...MY SISTER.

I WANT THE NAMES OF THE KREE INVOLVED IN THESE BOMBINGS.

UM... NO.

I BEG YOUR PARDON?

I'M NOT GIVING THEM UP, *MEDUSA*. I'M NOT CONDONING WHAT THEY DID, BUT THEY DIDN'T INTENTIONALLY ENDANGER *ANYONE*.

THE MUSEUM WAS SUPPOSED TO BE *CLOSED*.

BESIDES, I THINK I MADE SOME SERIOUS PROGRESS WITH ONE OF THEM. AND I'M WILLING TO BET THAT *SHE* WILL BE MORE EFFECTIVE AT CHANGING THE OTHERS' MINDS THAN YOU OR I.

SISTER, YOU ARE AN *OPTIMIST*, AND I ENVY THAT. THE FACT THAT YOU TRY TO SEE THE *GOOD* IN PEOPLE IS ONE OF THE THINGS I ADMIRE MOST ABOUT YOU.

BUT SOMETIMES I FEAR YOU ARE *TOO* TRUSTING. I JUST HOPE THAT TRUST ISN'T MISPLACED.

I KNOW...AND I KNOW YOU'RE IN A DIFFICULT POSITION. IT CAN'T BE EASY TRYING TO *MERGE* TWO COMPLETELY DIFFERENT CIVILIZATIONS.

AND I UNDERSTAND I'M ASKING YOU TO TAKE A RISK.

BUT I THINK IT'S A RISK WORTH TAKING.

THE NEXT DAY...

THANK YOU FOR SEEING ME, LADY CRYSTAL.

I HAVE BEEN TALKING TO MY FRIENDS...TRYING TO GET THEM TO CHANGE THE WAY THEY FEEL ABOUT YOU AND YOUR FAMILY.

AND...?

I...I WISH THEY WERE MORE RECEPTIVE. MOST STILL CLING TO THE NOTION THAT YOU ARE *OUTSIDERS*, AND *NOT* FIT TO RULE.

YOU SAID "MOST?" SO THAT MEANS SOME *ARE* CHANGING THEIR WAY OF THINKING?

YES... A *FEW*.

THEN THAT IS A START.

MY SISTER RECENTLY CALLED ME AN *OPTIMIST*, AND I THINK SHE WAS RIGHT.

BECAUSE I SEE *GOOD* THINGS IN THE FUTURE FOR OUR TWO RACES.

AND THE REASON WHY...

...IS RIGHT THERE.

A BEGINNING...

THE STARJAMMER, DAYS BEFORE THE WEDDING OF CRYSTAL AND RONAN, EN ROUTE TO THE KREE EMPIRE...

LISTEN, I KNOW WE'RE *OUTNUMBERED* AND *OUTGUNNED*, BUT WE'RE GONNA GET THROUGH THIS.

WE'RE GOING TO *DEFEAT* VULCAN AND RESTORE *EMPRESS LILANDRA* TO THE THRONE.

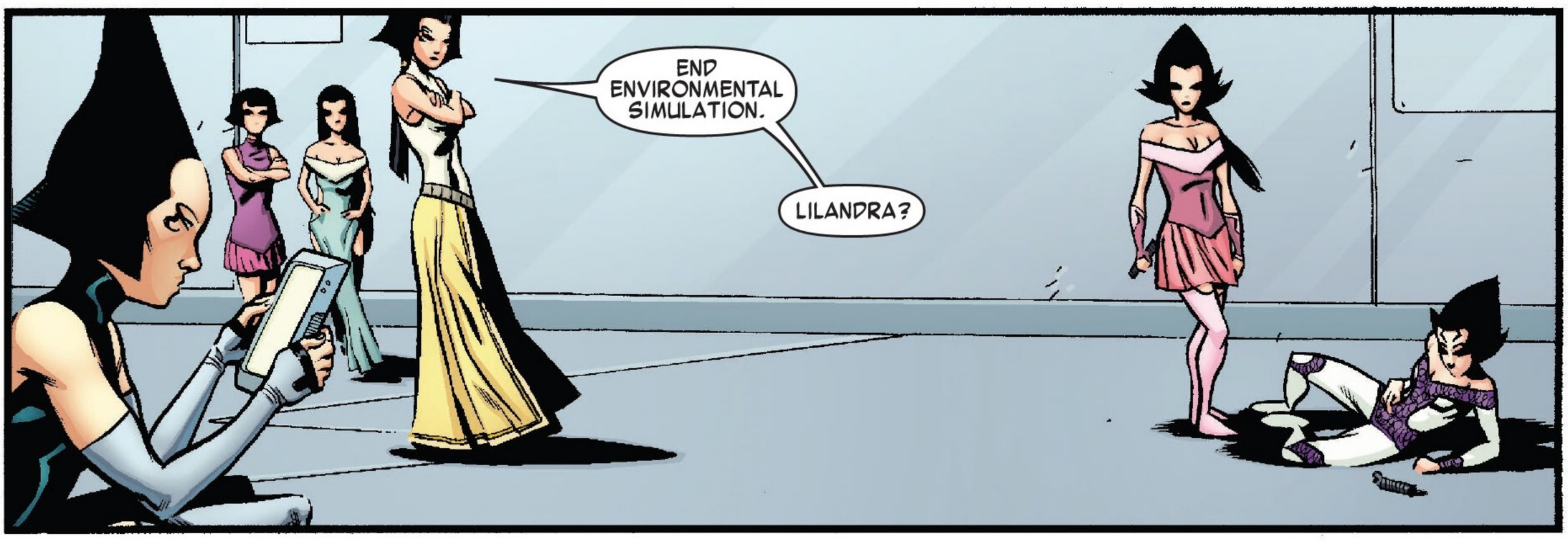
YOU TRYING TO CONVINCE *US* OR *YOURSELF*, HAVOK?

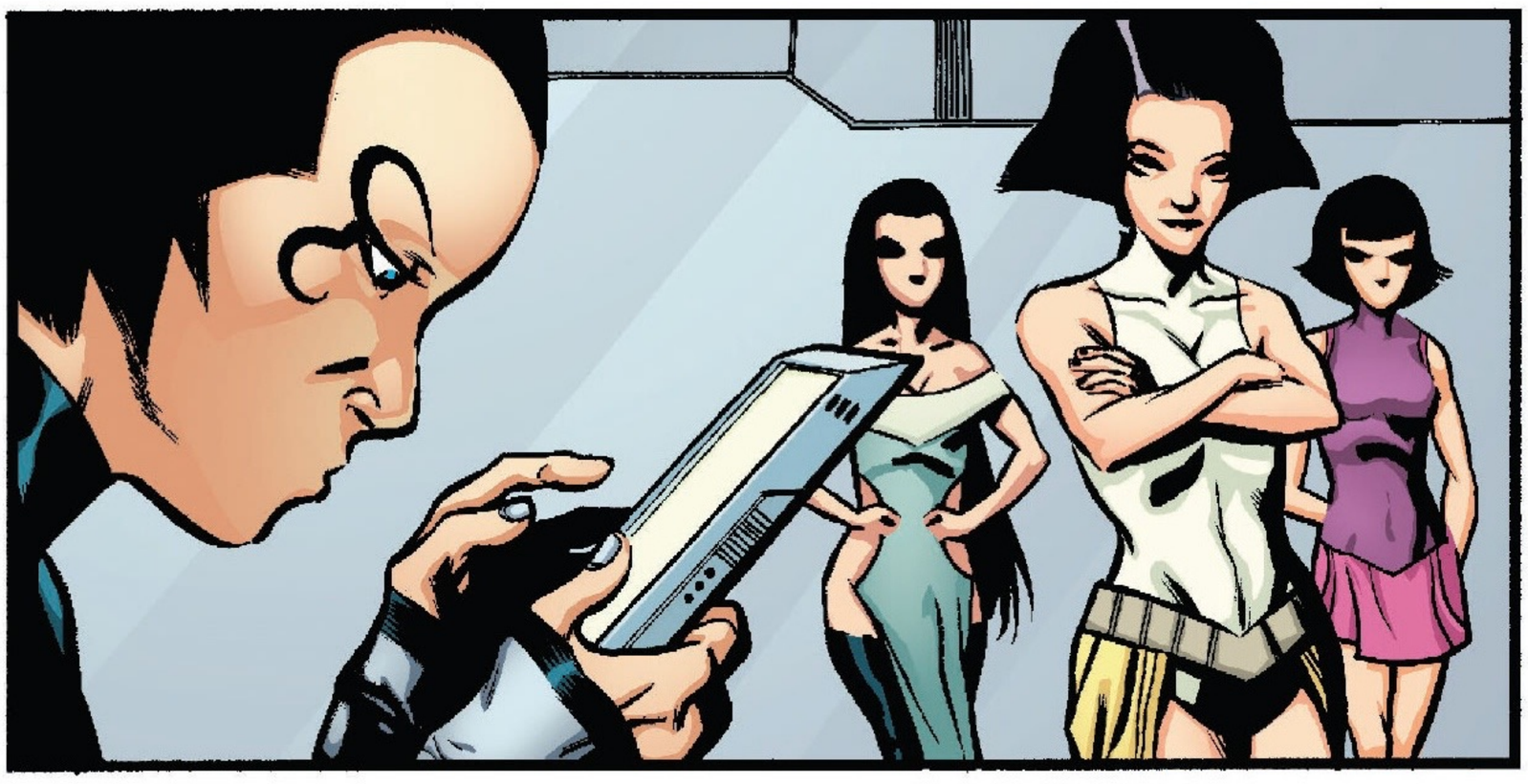
RITE OF PASSAGE

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, THE CHANDILAR ACADEMY...
AH!

I BELIEVE I HAVE THE KILLING STRIKE, DO I NOT?

YES, KREN. YOU WIN.
AGAIN.
YOU FORGOT TO SAY "AGAIN."


END ENVIRONMENTAL SIMULATION.
LILANDRA?



CADET LILANDRA!

YOU'RE *NEXT.* YOU AND KREN.

I'D BE HAPPY TO LET SOMEONE ELSE GO IN MY PLACE, *INSTRUCTOR NASSIS.*

NOT A *CHANCE.*

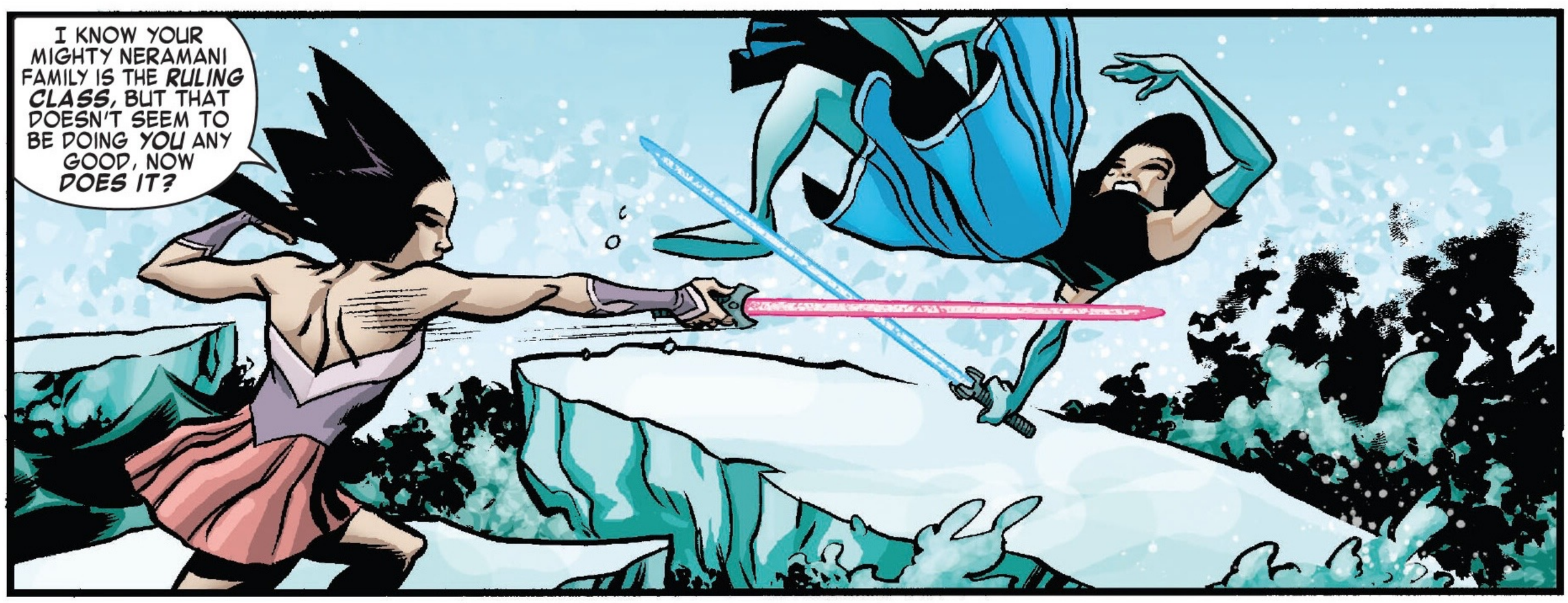
BEGIN ENVIRONMENTAL SIMULATION, DESIGNATE 274.

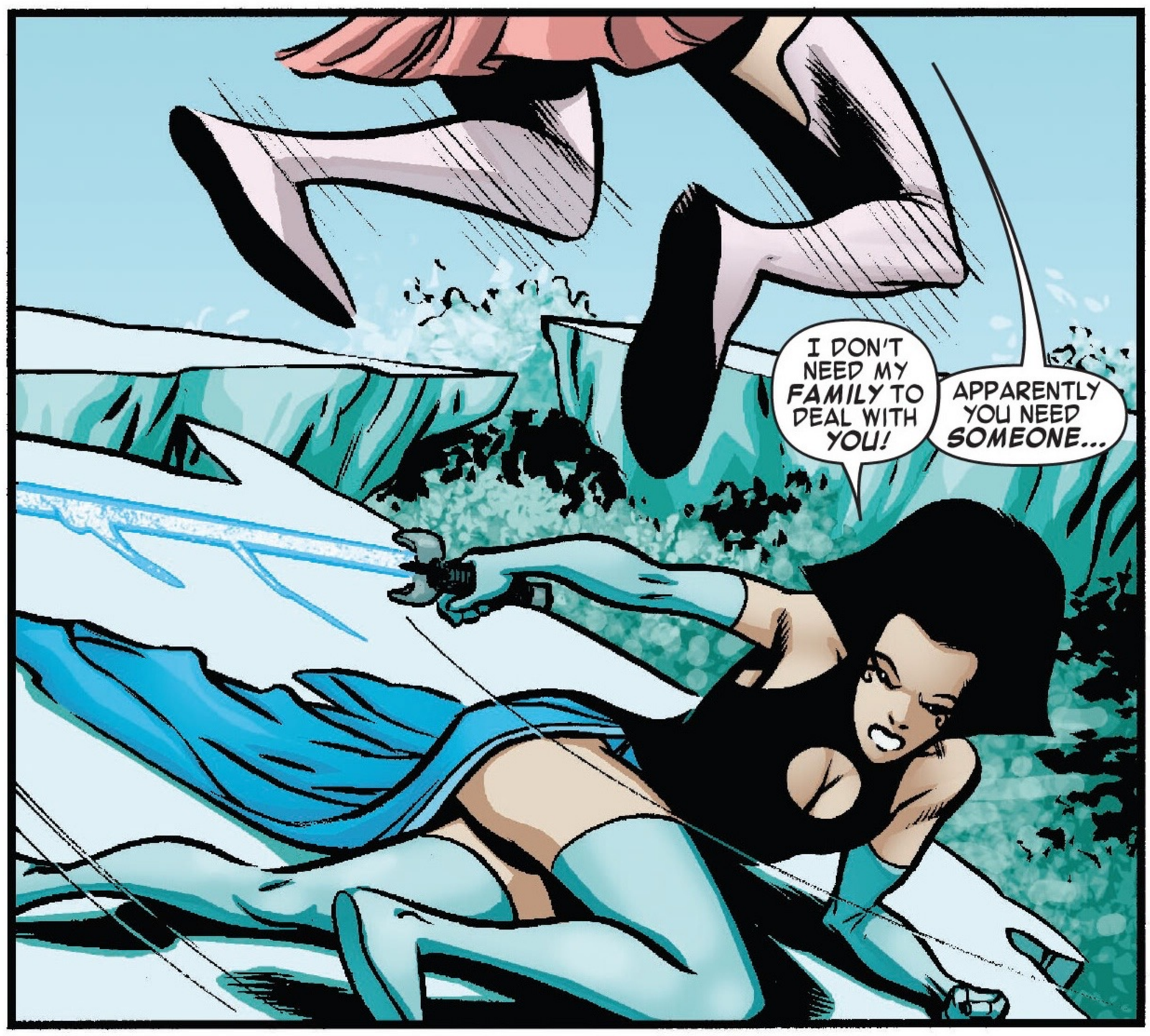
OH!

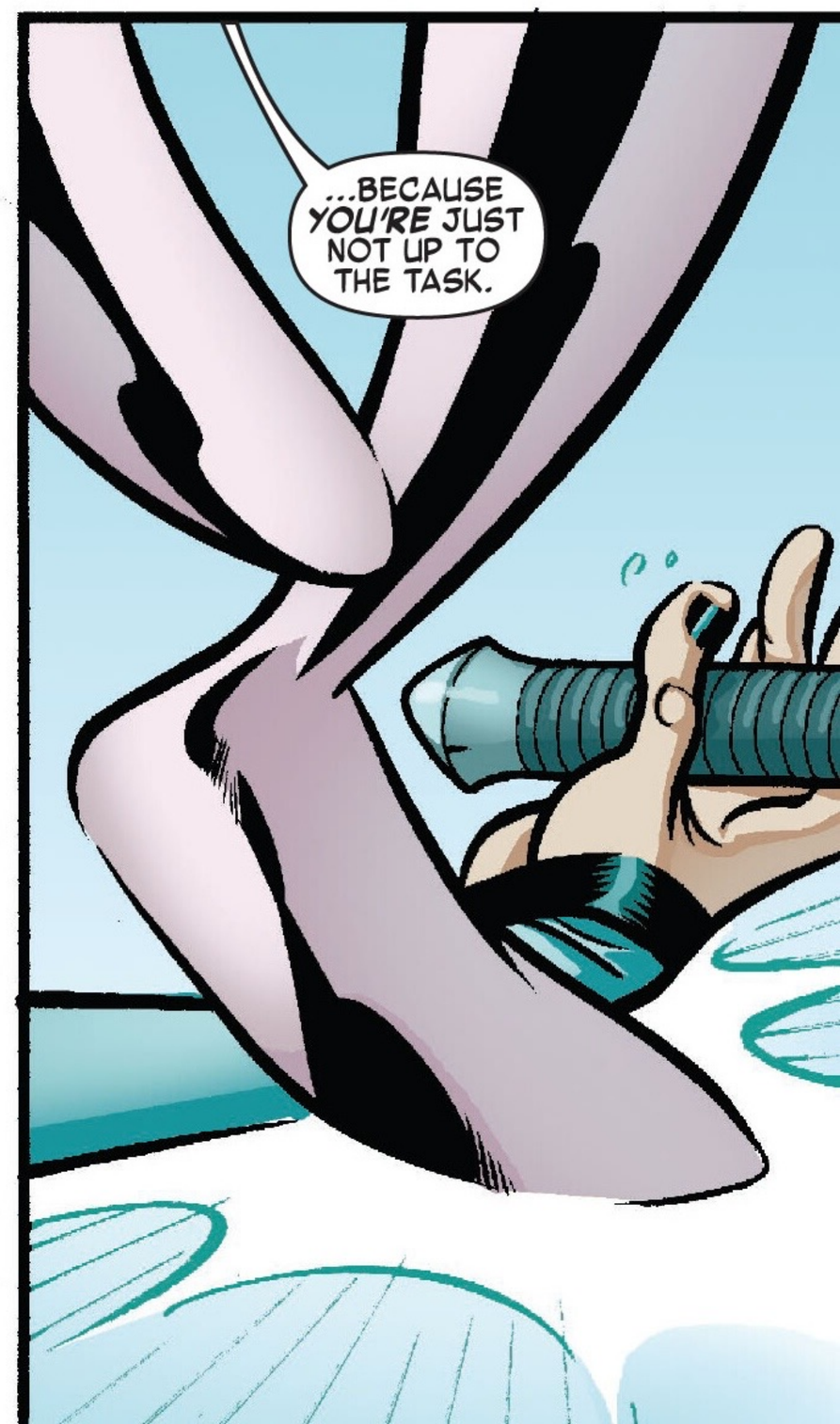
HAAAIII!!!

AH!
LUCKY.

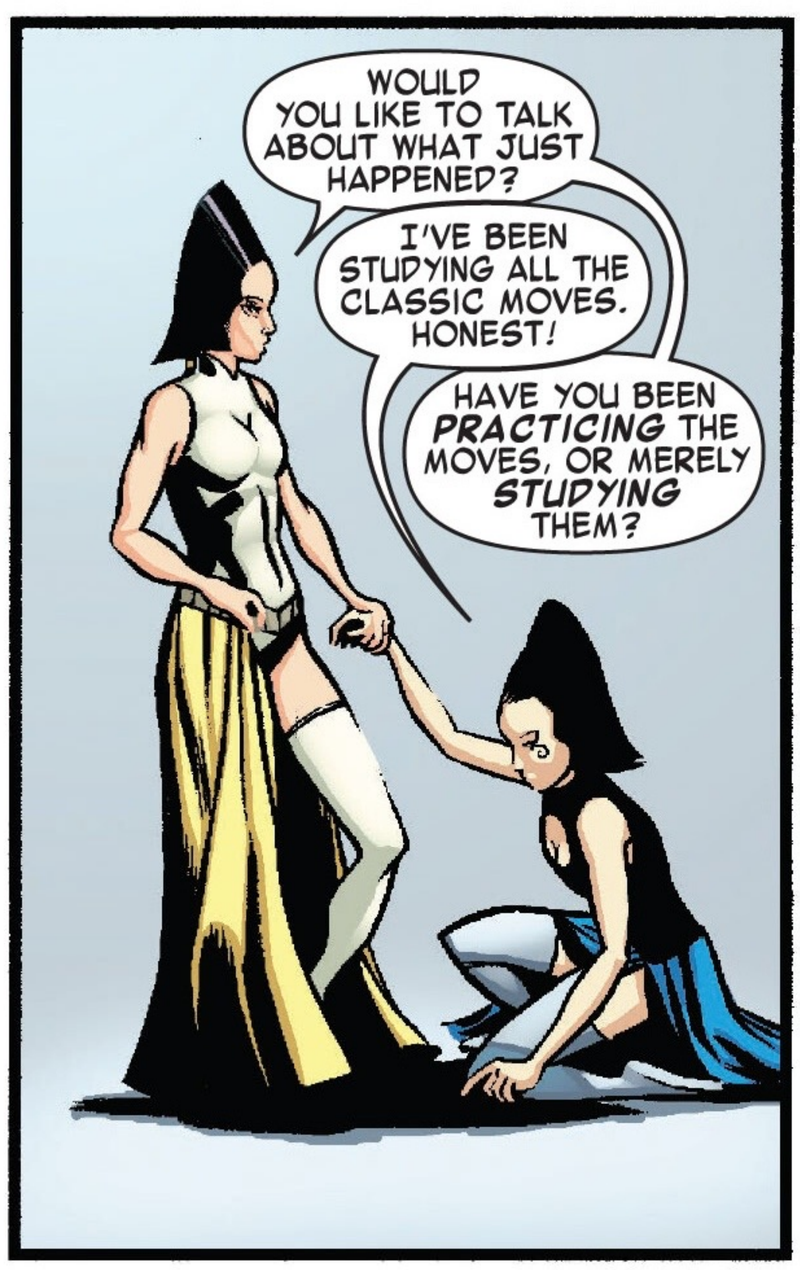
YOU'RE RUNNING AWAY? THAT'S YOUR STRATEGY?

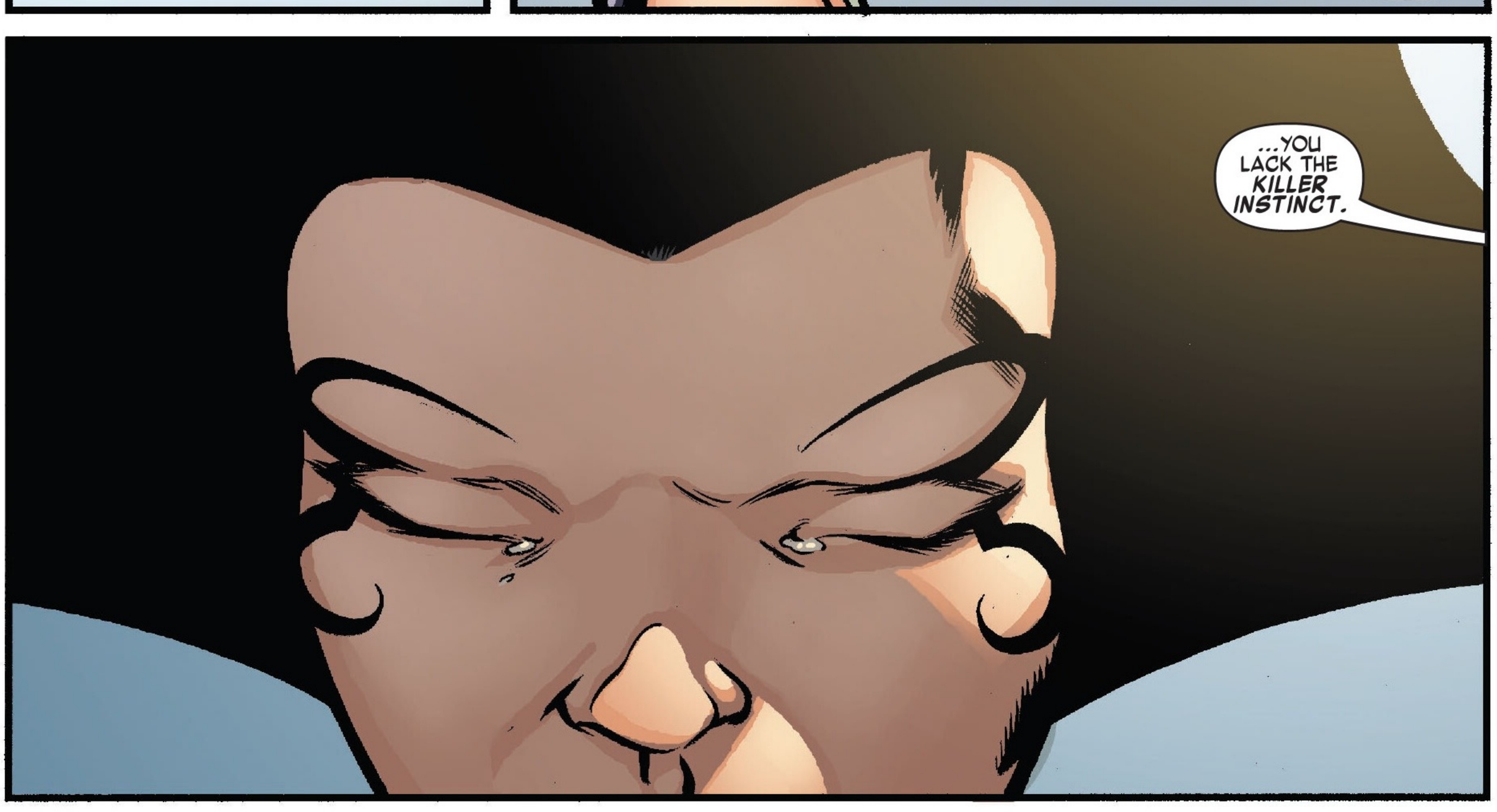

I KNOW YOUR MIGHTY NERAMANI FAMILY IS THE RULING CLASS, BUT THAT DOESN'T SEEM TO BE DOING YOU ANY GOOD, NOW DOES IT?

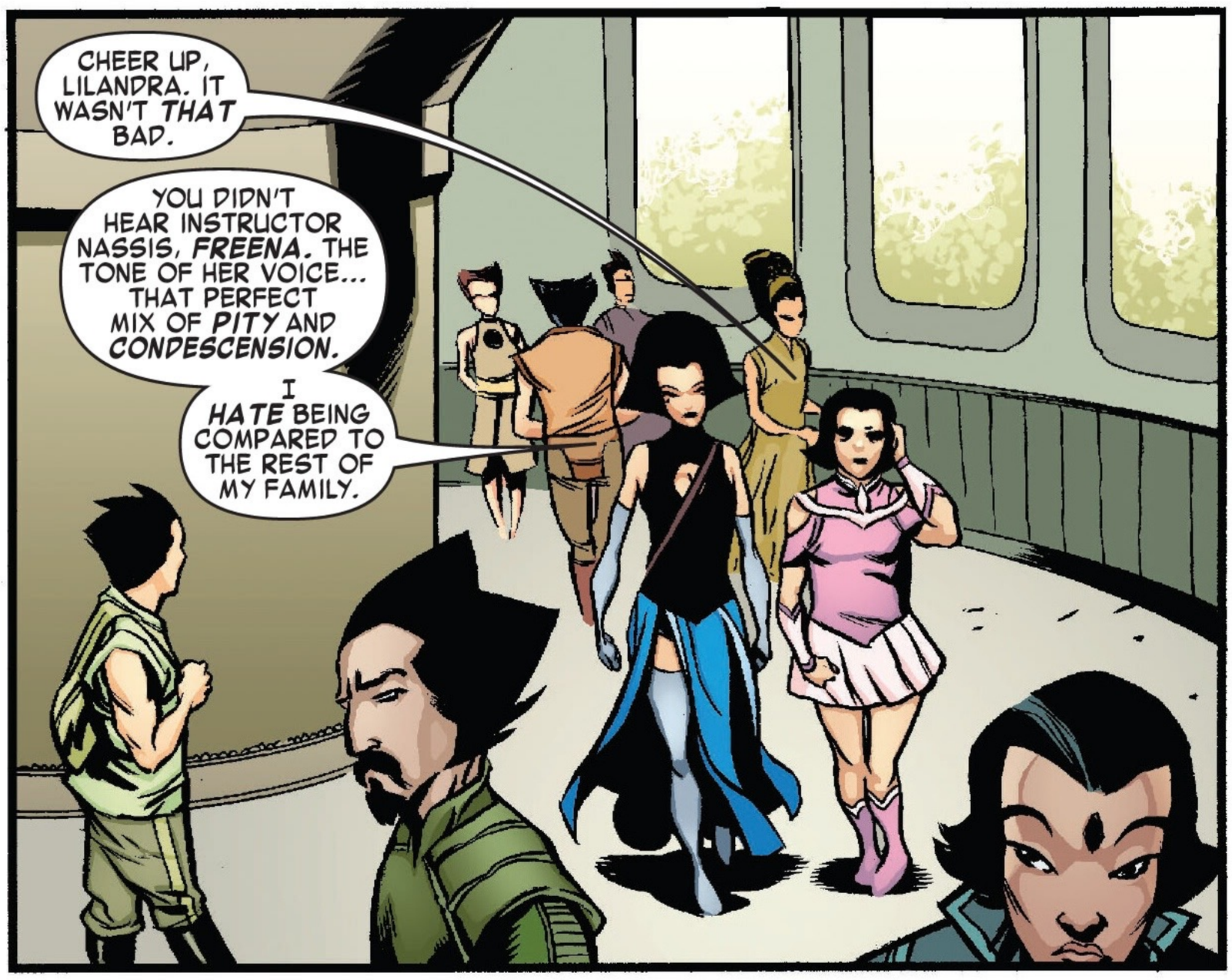

I DON'T NEED MY FAMILY TO DEAL WITH YOU!
APPARENTLY YOU NEED SOMEONE...


...BECAUSE YOU'RE JUST NOT UP TO THE TASK.

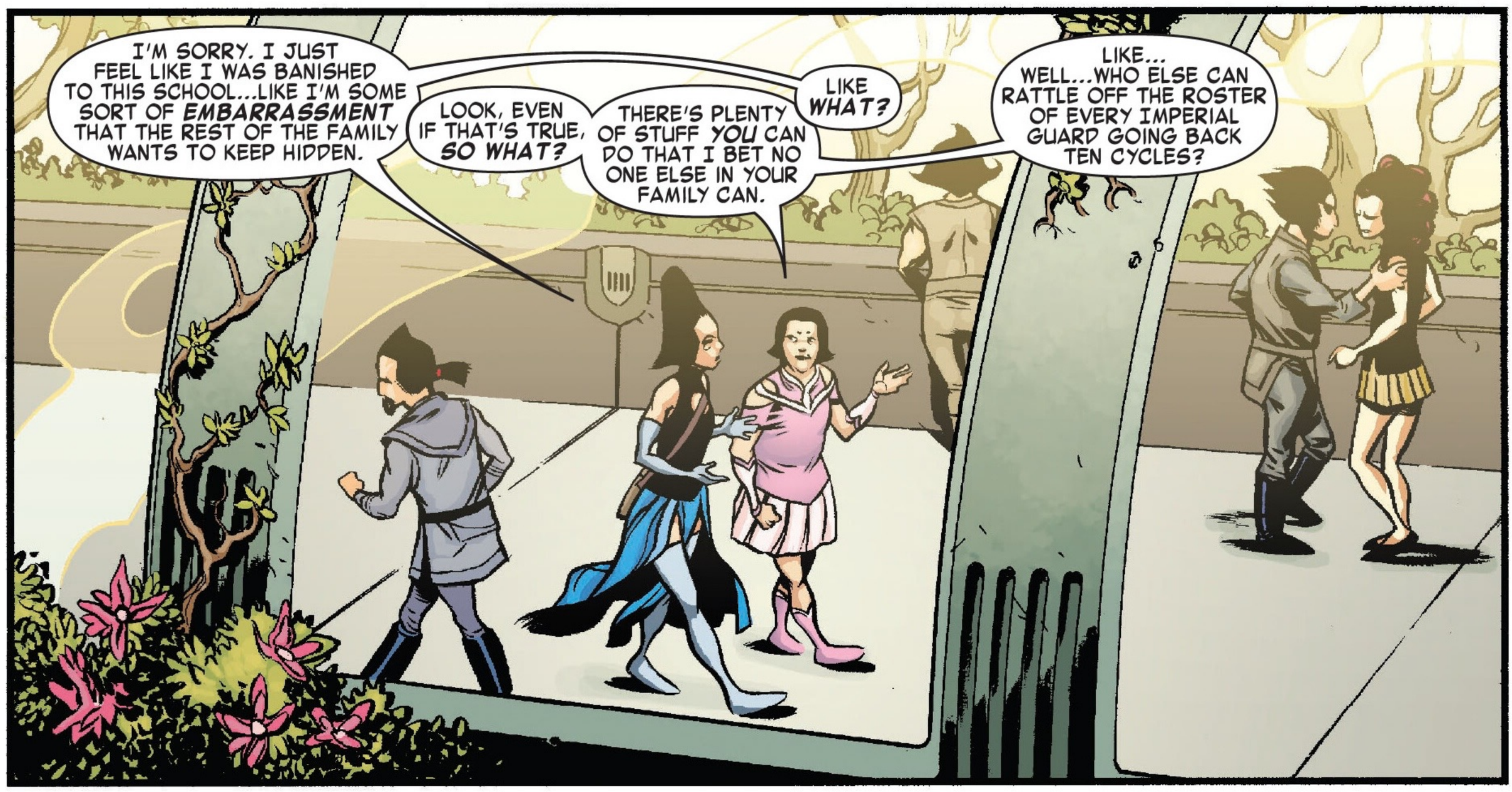
END SIMULATION.
LET HER UP, KREN.
BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME, *YOUR MAJESTY.*






CHEER UP, LILANDRA. IT WASN'T *THAT* BAD.
YOU DIDN'T HEAR INSTRUCTOR NASSIS, *FREENA.* THE TONE OF HER VOICE... THAT PERFECT MIX OF *PITY* AND *CONDESCENSION.*
I *HATE* BEING COMPARED TO THE REST OF MY FAMILY.

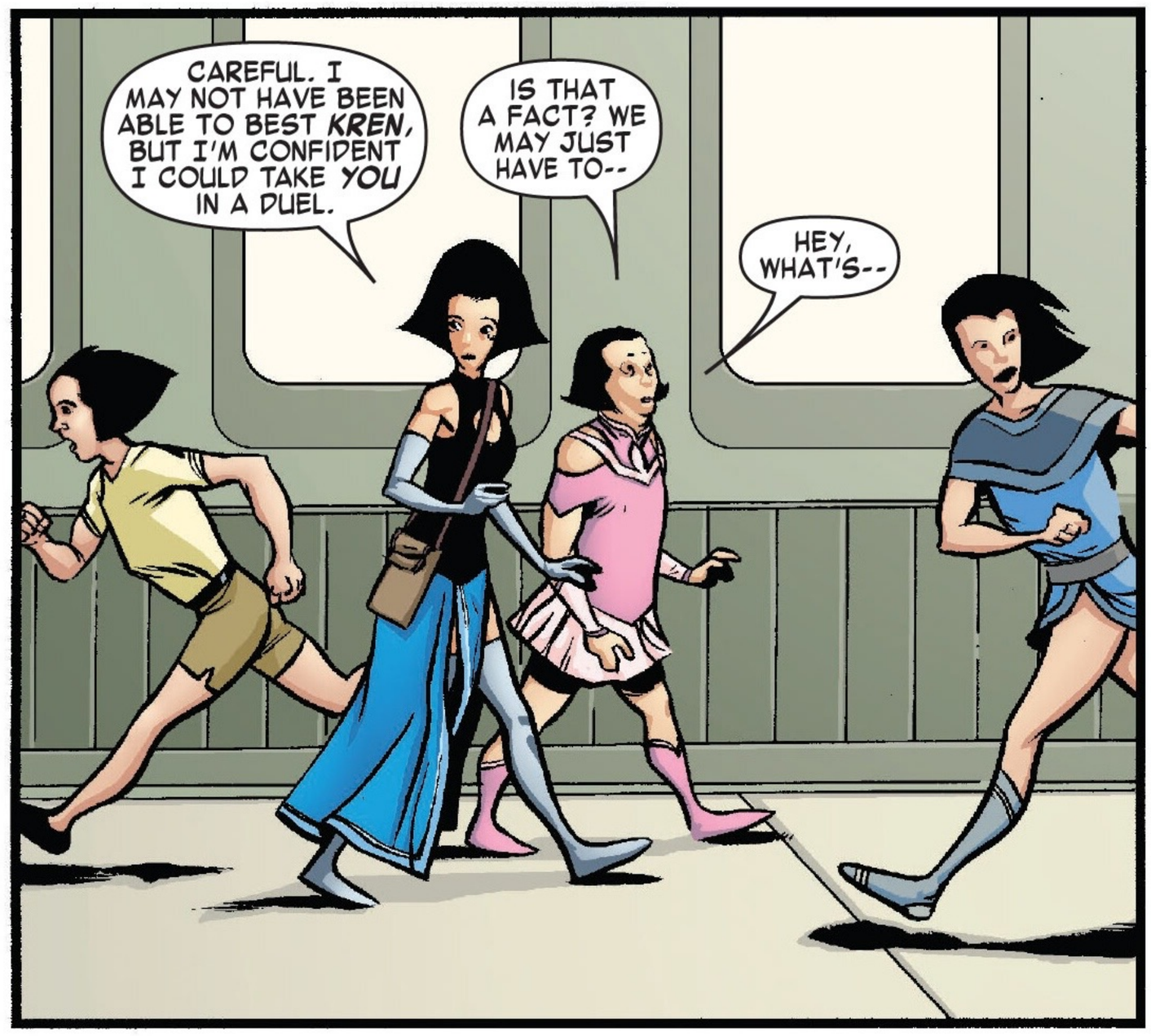
GEE, *REALLY?*
I HADN'T NOTICED, BECAUSE YOU NEVER *EVER* MENTION IT.


I'M SORRY. I JUST FEEL LIKE I WAS BANISHED TO THIS SCHOOL...LIKE I'M SOME SORT OF *EMBARRASSMENT* THAT THE REST OF THE FAMILY WANTS TO KEEP HIDDEN.
LOOK, EVEN IF THAT'S TRUE, *SO WHAT?*
THERE'S PLENTY OF STUFF *YOU* CAN DO THAT I BET NO ONE ELSE IN YOUR FAMILY CAN.
LIKE *WHAT?*
LIKE... WELL...WHO ELSE CAN RATTLE OFF THE ROSTER OF EVERY IMPERIAL GUARD GOING BACK TEN CYCLES?

AND WHO ELSE KNOWS WHICH ENVIRONMENTS ARE HOSTILE TO EACH RACE IN THE SHI'AR EMPIRE?
AND...AND DON'T EVEN GET ME STARTED ON *TREES.* YOU CAN PROBABLY TELL ME WHICH SPECIES OF TREE IS NATIVE TO EACH REGION OF CHANDILAR, CAN'T YOU?

HA HA!
OKAY, OKAY...YOU'VE MADE YOUR POINT.
EVERYONE, LOOK! LILANDRA IS *LAUGHING!*
SOMEONE RECORD THIS SO WE HAVE EVIDENCE!

SO? ARE YOU SUFFICIENTLY CHEERED UP?
FOR THE TIME BEING, I SUPPOSE.
UNTIL YOU REVERT TO YOUR DEFAULT MOROSE-NESS.


CAREFUL. I MAY NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO BEST KREN, BUT I'M CONFIDENT I COULD TAKE YOU IN A DUEL.
IS THAT A FACT? WE MAY JUST HAVE TO--
HEY, WHAT'S--

RUN!
WHAT'S THE MATTER?
I DON'T--
THEY'RE COMING!!

HURRY! COME THIS WAY!
INSTRUCTOR, I DON'T UNDERSTAND!

THEY'RE HERE...IN THE SCHOOL...

"...THE BROOD!"

RUN, CHILDREN!
I'LL TRY TO HOLD THEM OFF!

THIS ONE FIGHTS!

IT WILL MAKE A MOST WORTHY HOST FOR OUR EGGS!

AAAAAHHH!
THE BROOD KILLED INSTRUCTOR NASSIS! THEY'RE GOING TO KILL US!
INSTRUCTOR DAHREV, WHAT DO WE DO?

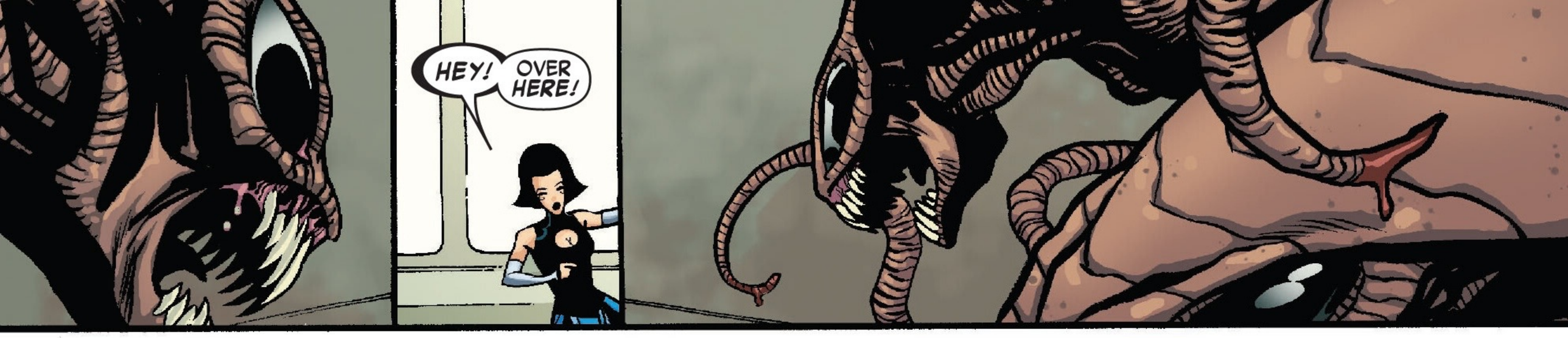
I...I...
THEY...

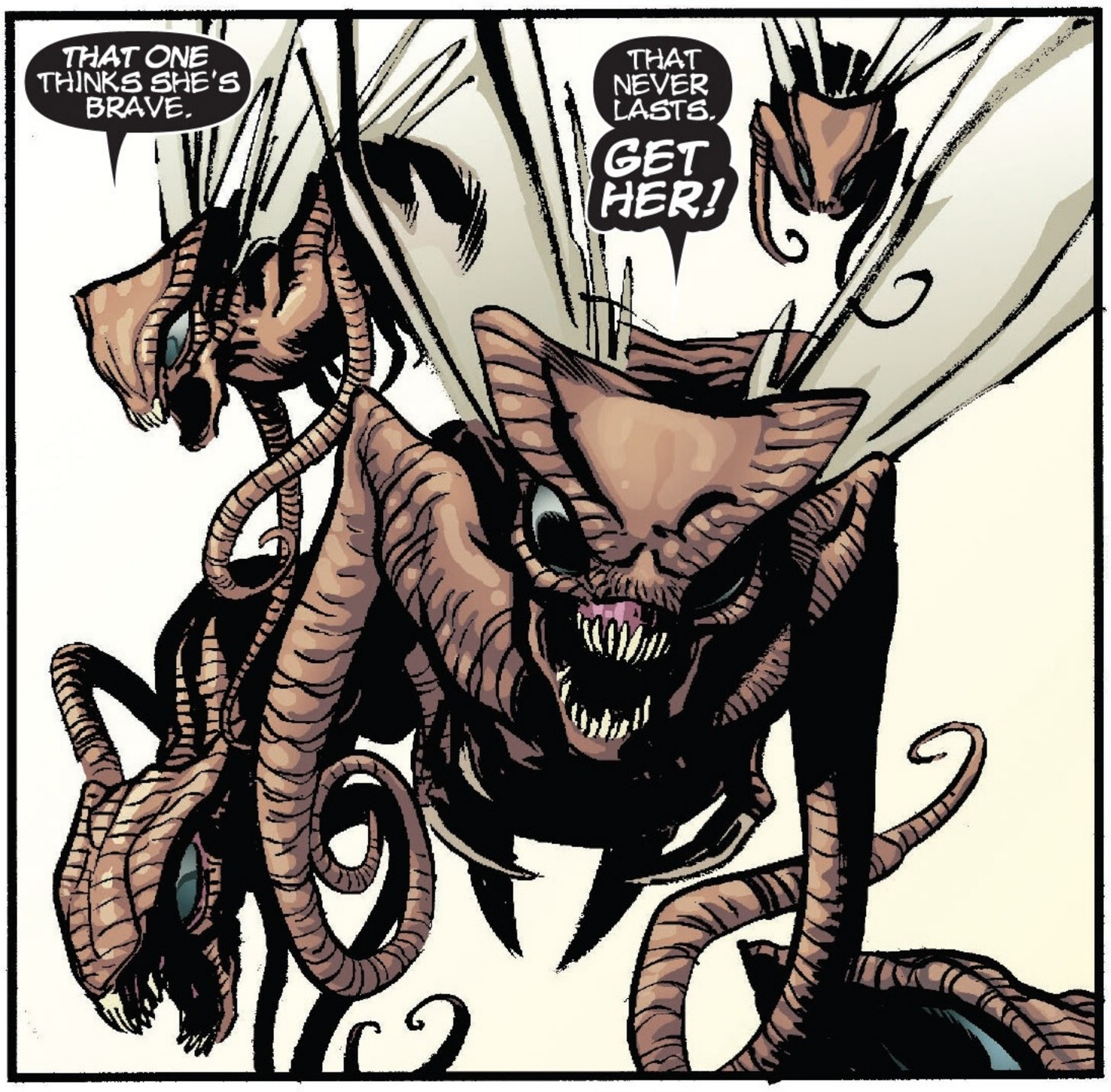
WE'RE DEAD!
THEY'RE GOING TO PUT THEIR EGGS IN US!
DID YOU HEAR THAT, LILANDRA? THEY'RE GOING TO GET US ALL!

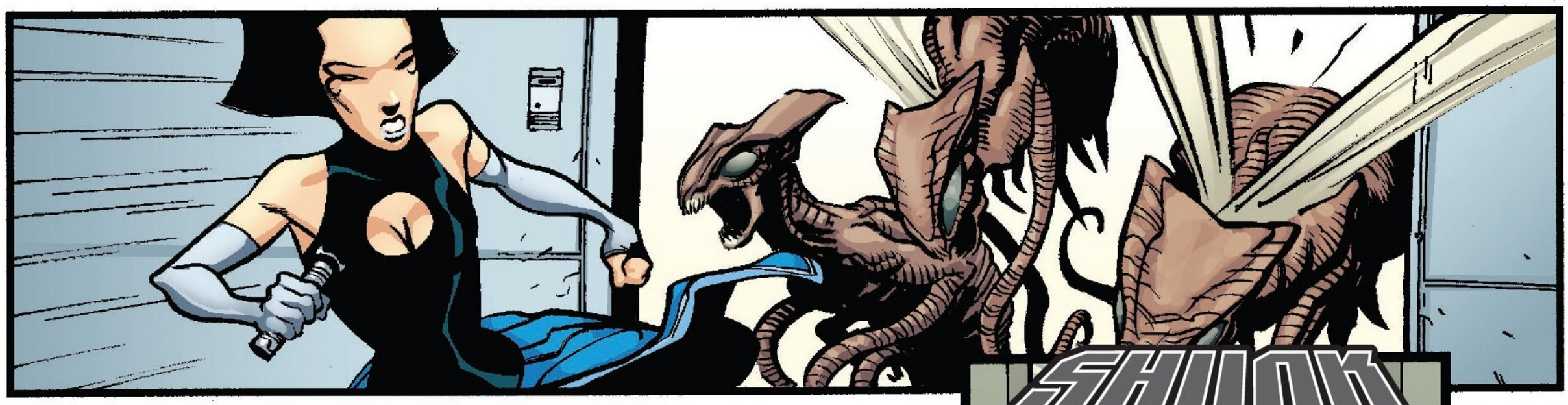
NO...

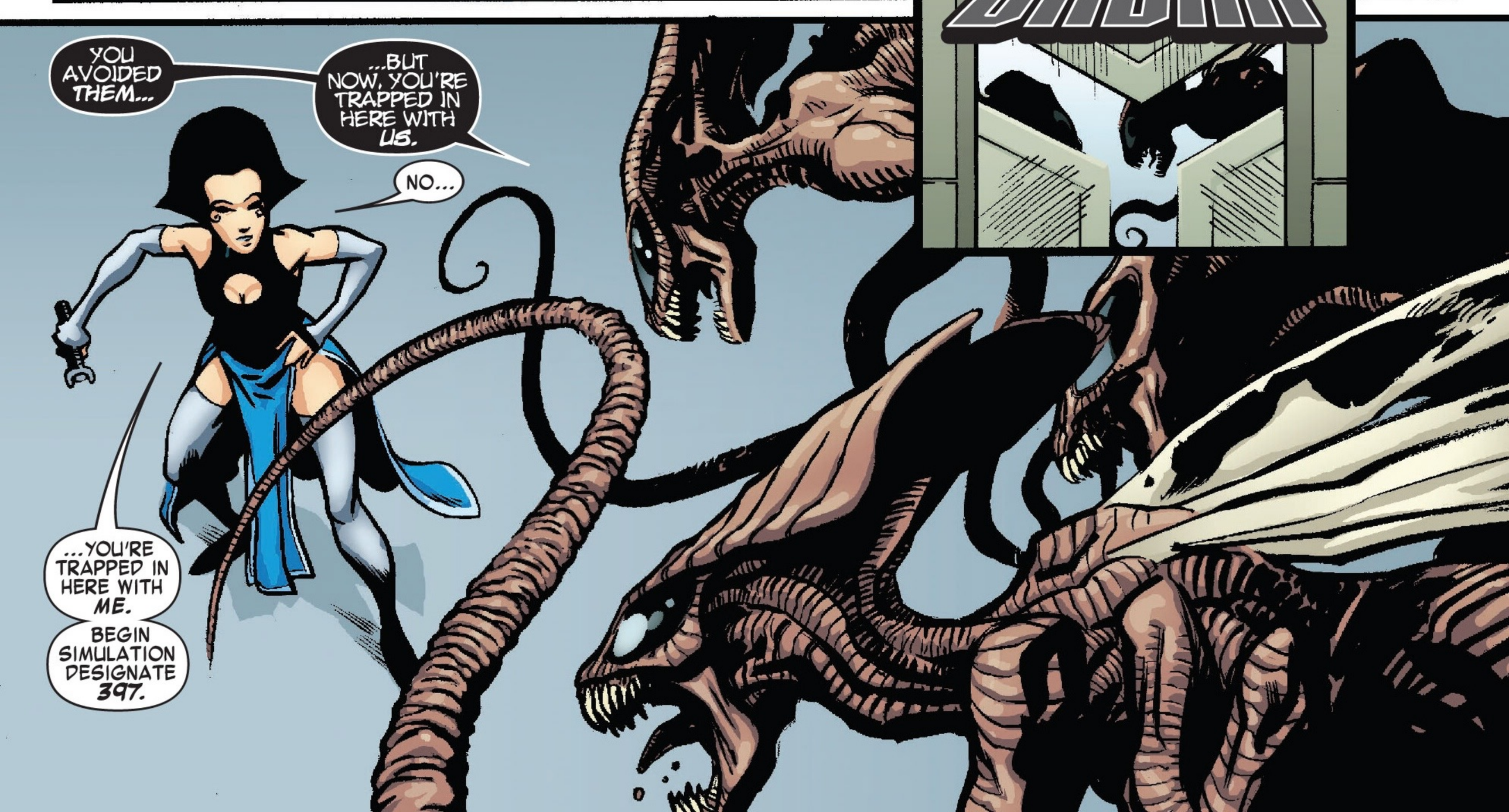
NO, THEY'RE NOT.

HERE'S WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO...


HEY!
OVER HERE!

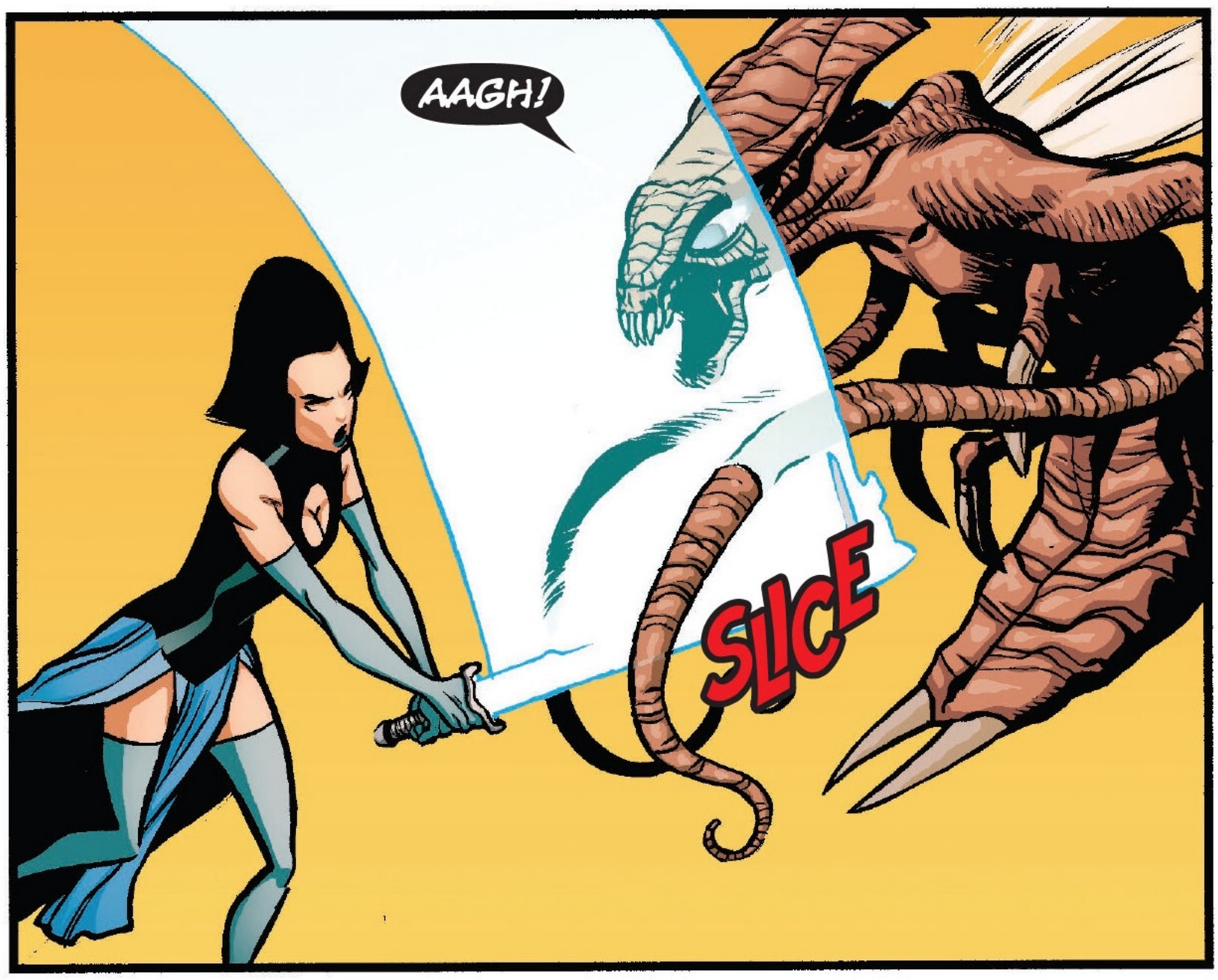

THAT ONE THINKS SHE'S BRAVE.
THAT NEVER LASTS.
GET HER!




SHUNK
YOU AVOIDED THEM...
...BUT NOW, YOU'RE TRAPPED IN HERE WITH US.
NO...
...YOU'RE TRAPPED IN HERE WITH ME.
BEGIN SIMULATION DESIGNATE 397.

AAAIIEE!!
THE FIRE!
IT WILL CONSUME US!

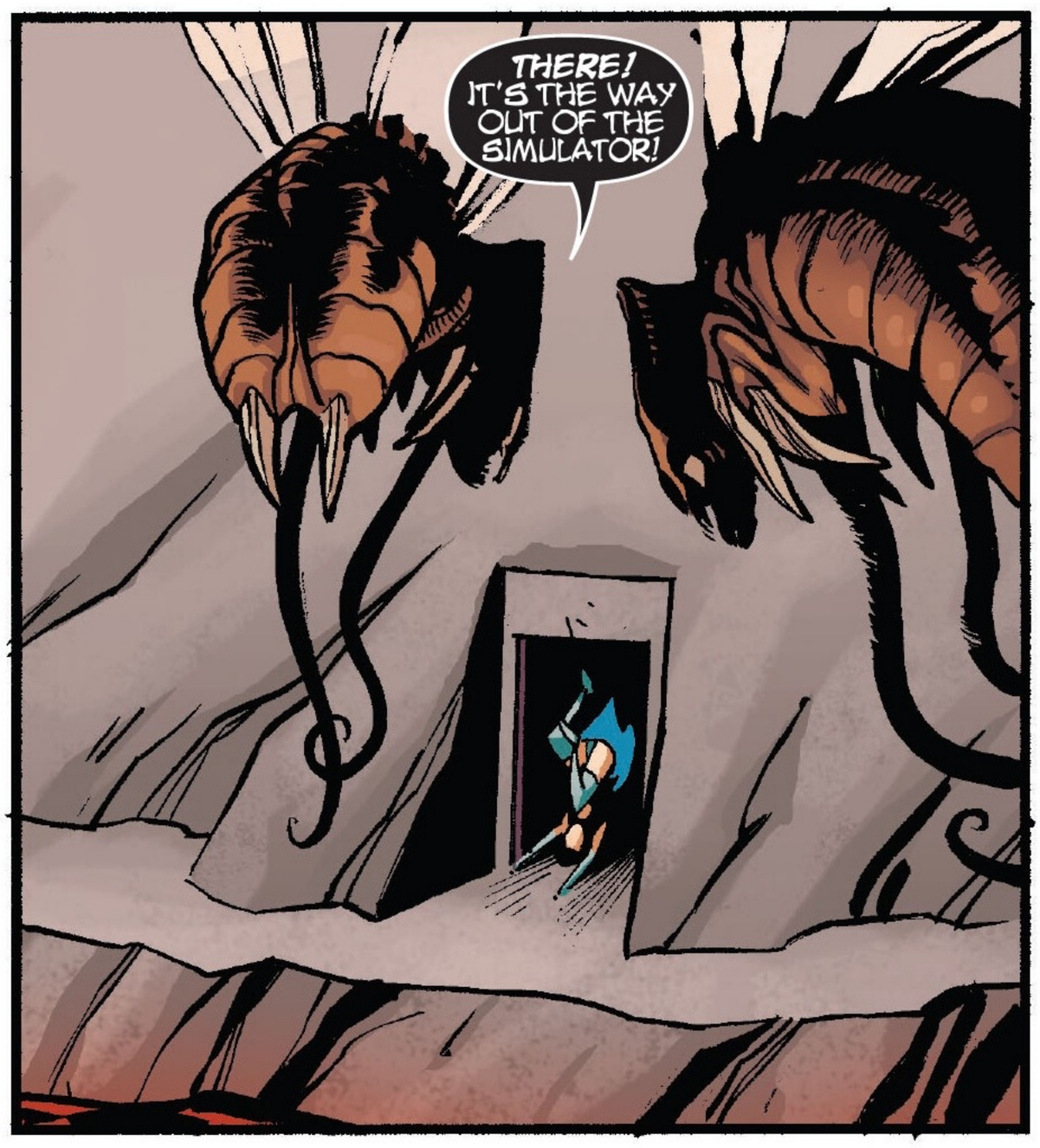
FWSSH

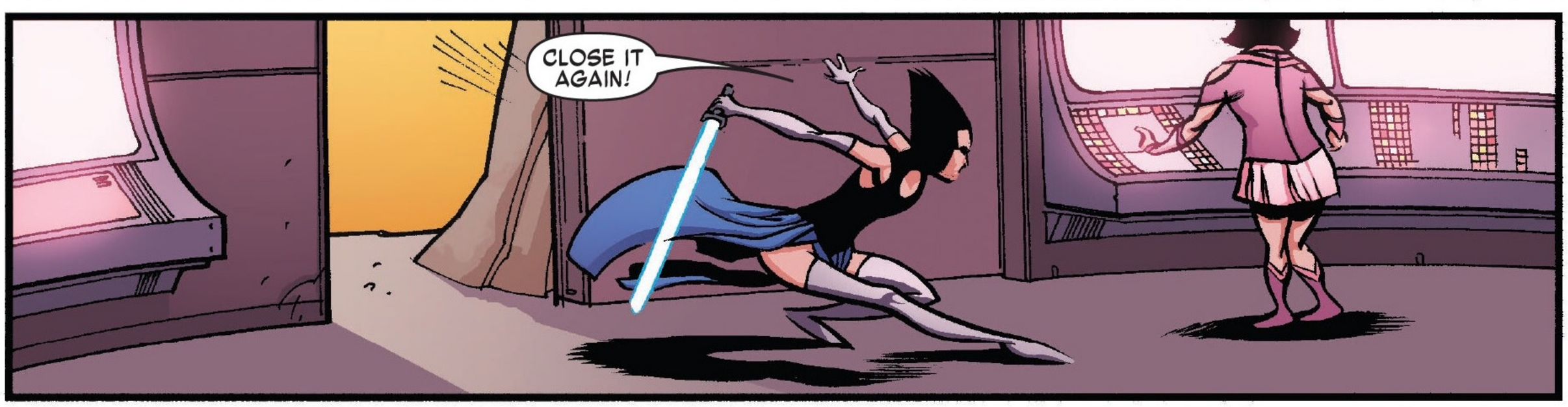

AAGH!
SLICE

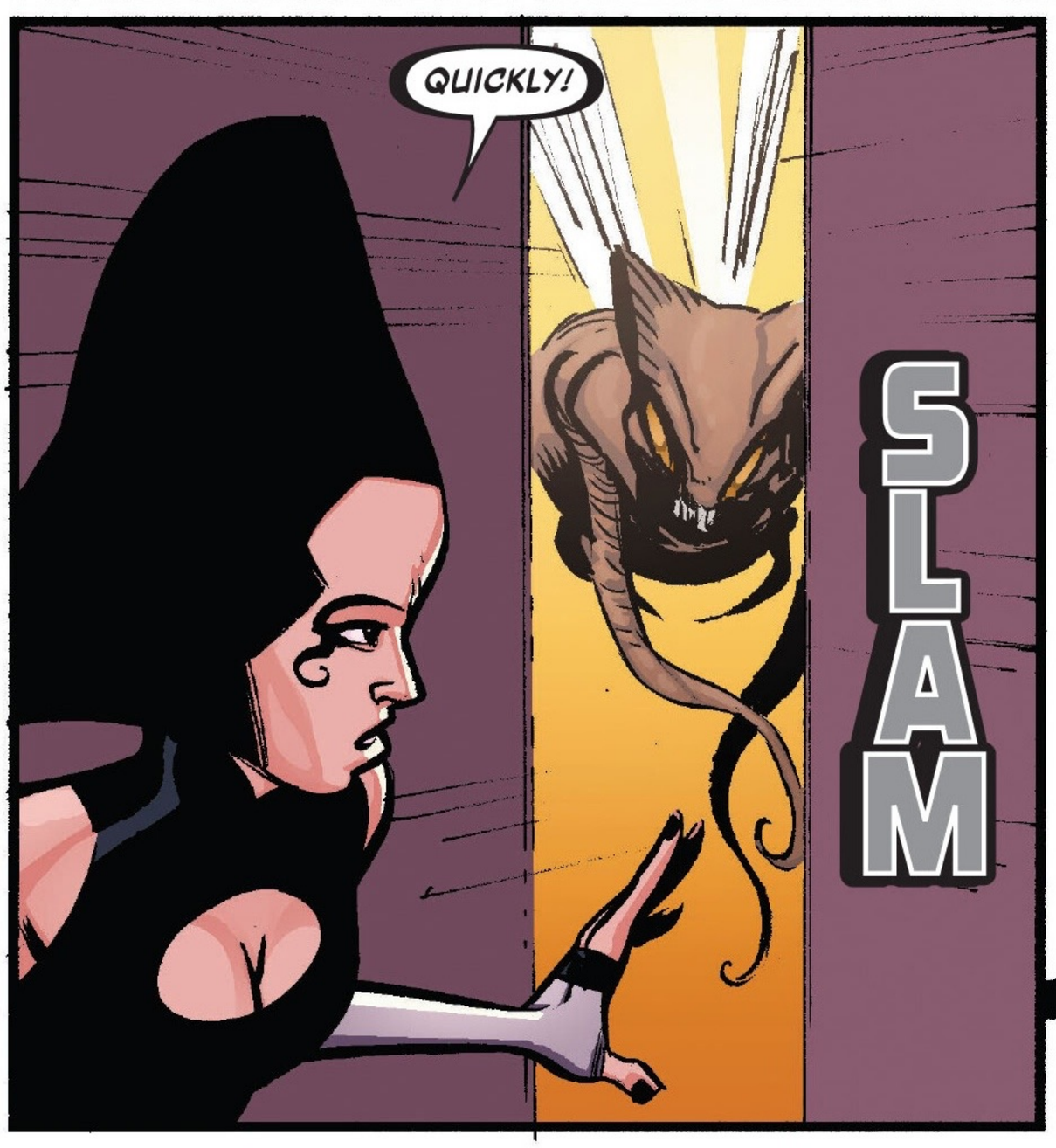
SWISSH

AFTER THE SHI'AR STRIPLING!!!
SHE CANNOT ESCAPE!!
FREENA!

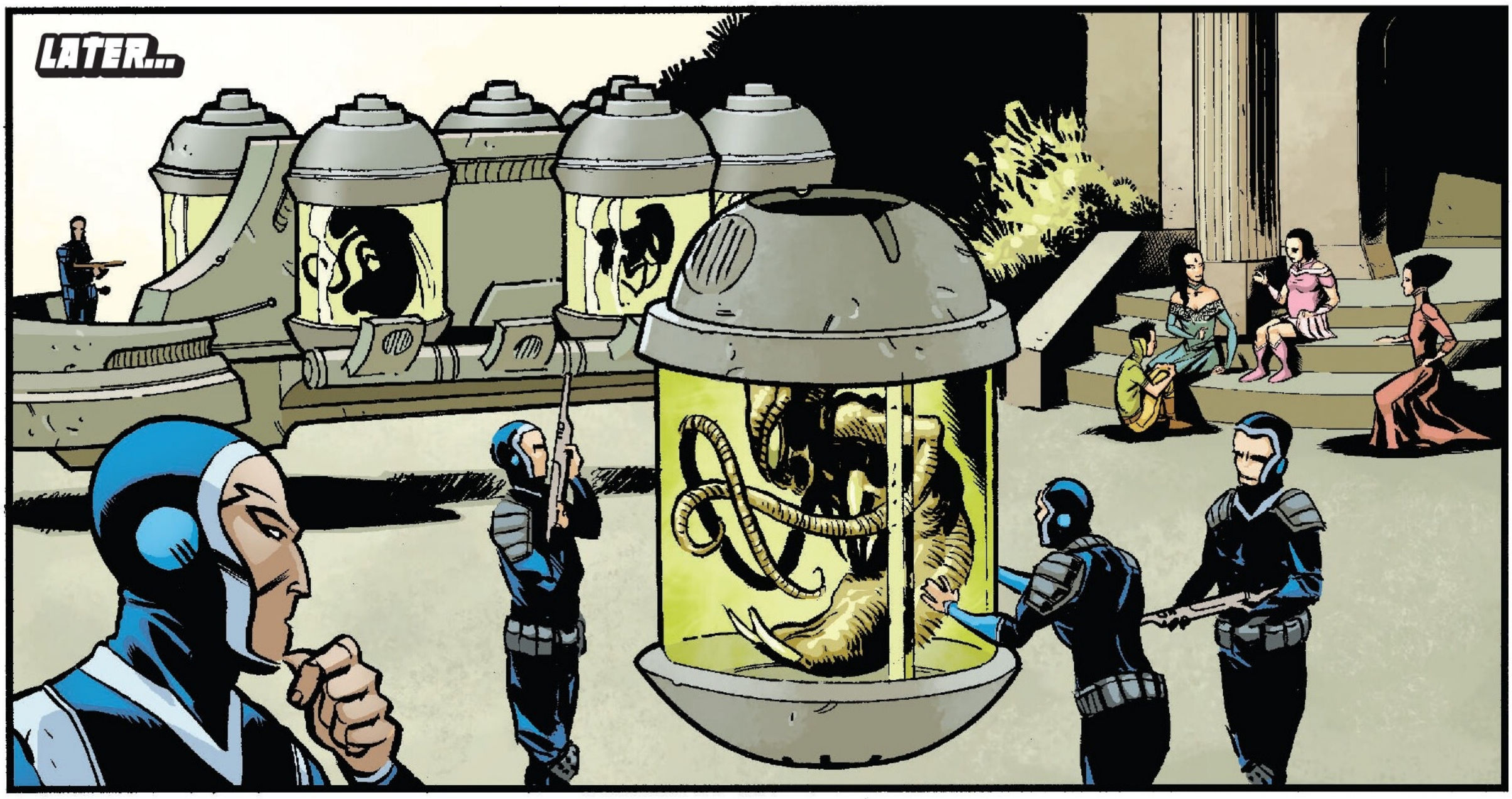
OPEN THE DOOR!
NOW!

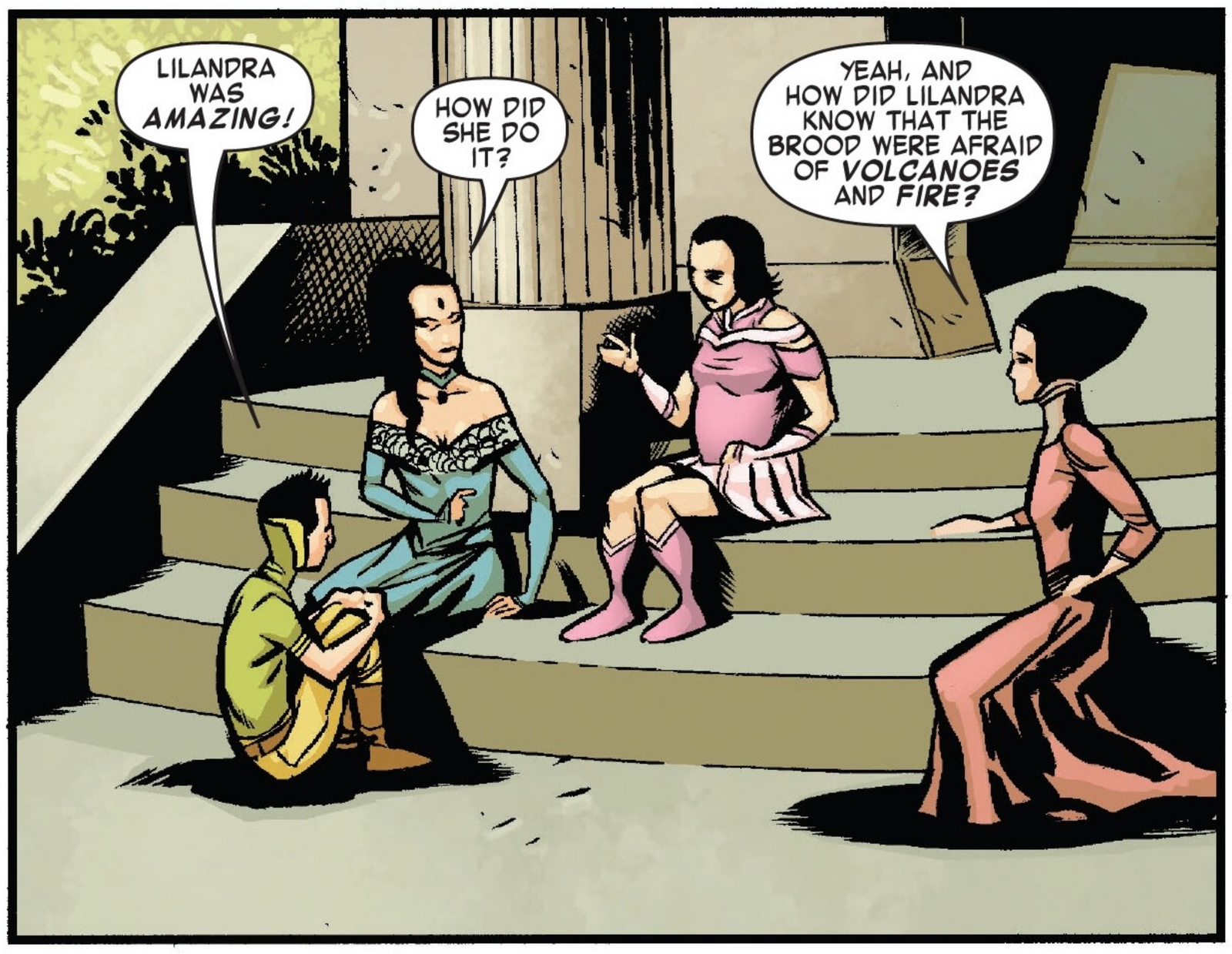

THERE! IT'S THE WAY OUT OF THE SIMULATOR!


CLOSE IT AGAIN!


QUICKLY!
SLAM

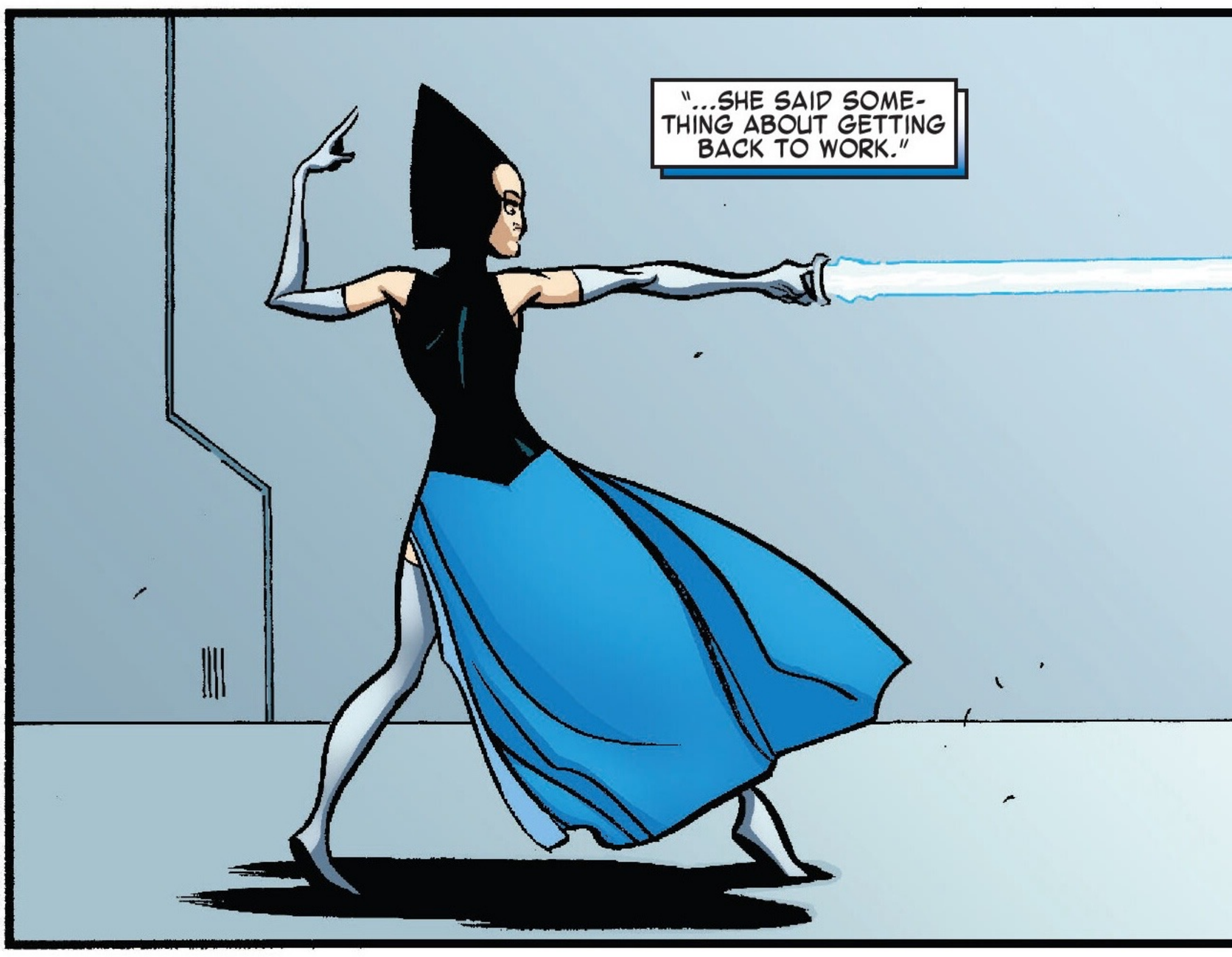
BANG BANG BANG
I DID IT.
I DID IT.


LATER...


LILANDRA WAS AMAZING!
HOW DID SHE DO IT?
YEAH, AND HOW DID LILANDRA KNOW THAT THE BROOD WERE AFRAID OF VOLCANOES AND FIRE?

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, SHE READ IT SOMEWHERE.

SO WHERE IS SHE NOW?
WELL...


"...SHE SAID SOMETHING ABOUT GETTING BACK TO WORK."

NO. YOU MAY BE FEELING BEATEN AND DEMORALIZED AT THE MOMENT, BUT ALL OF US--NO MATTER WHAT OTHERS MAY THINK--HAVE THE POWER TO STAND AND FIGHT. IT'S SIMPLY A QUESTION OF WHAT YOU'RE WILLING TO SACRIFICE.

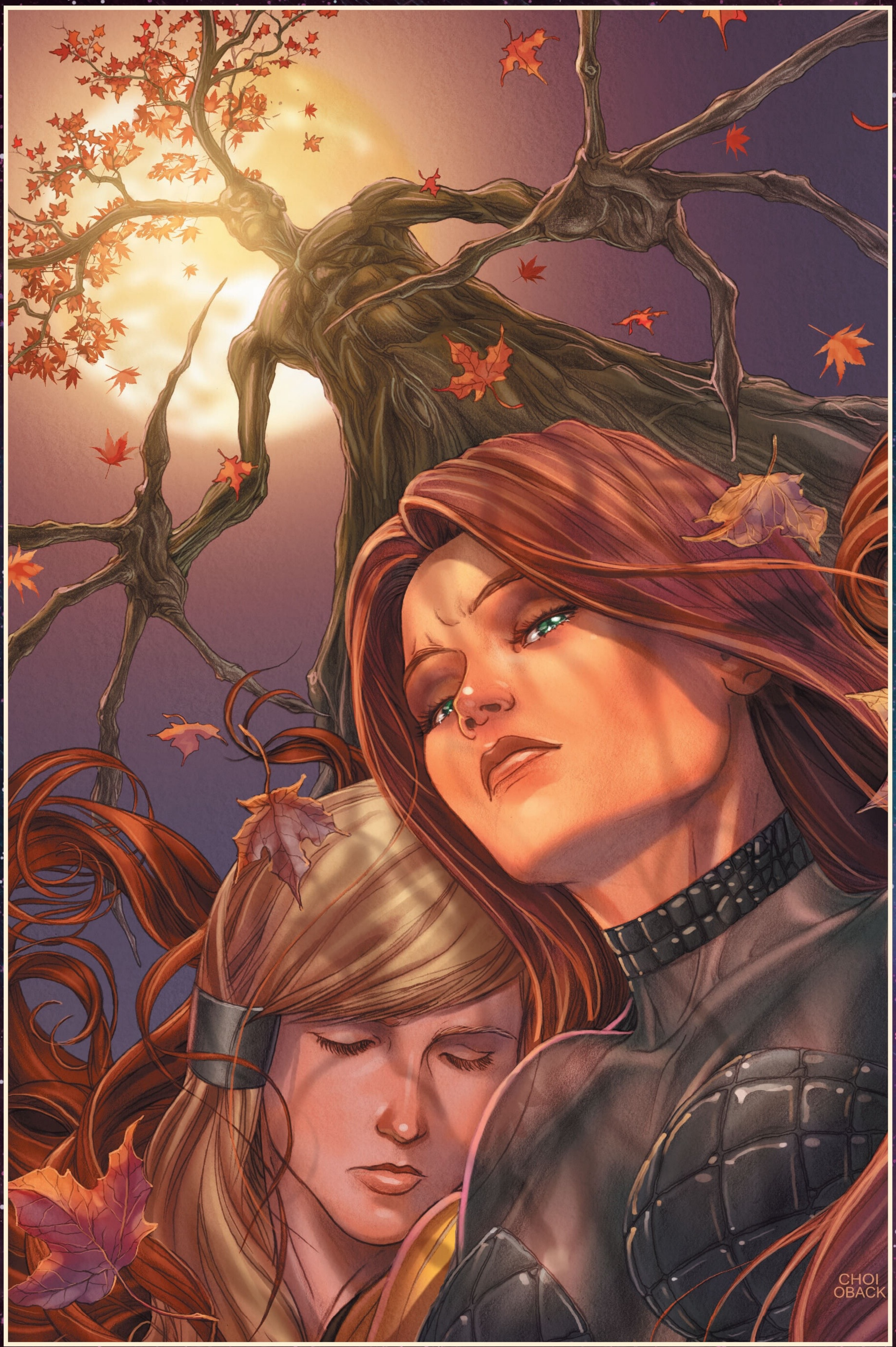
IT DOESN'T MATTER IF OUR ENEMY HAS SUPERIOR NUMBERS OR FIREPOWER. I KNOW THE ODDS SEEM INSURMOUNTABLE.

I FOUGHT HARD TO GAIN THE HONOR OF LEADING THE SHI'AR PEOPLE, AND I'LL FIGHT JUST AS HARD TO REGAIN THAT HONOR.

BUT WE'RE GOING TO FIGHT. WE'RE GOING TO FIGHT HARD AND MORE THAN THAT, WE'RE GOING TO FIGHT SMART.

THAT IS HOW WE'RE GOING TO WIN THIS WAR.

END.



War of Kings #6 variant by MIKE CHOI & SONIA OBACK

WAR OF KINGS 1

APPROACHING THE FRONTIER OF THE KREE EMPIRE...

WHEN THE STARJAMMERS CAME TO US, THEY CAME WILD AND HEAD-LONG, THE WAY THEY LIVE EVERY *MINUTE* OF THEIR SWASHBUCKLING LIVES.

KREE FRONTIER! CALLING KREE FRONTIER! THIS IS THE STARJAMMER!

POLARIS

HAVOK

MARVEL GIRL

LILANDRA

CH'OD

KORVUS

I REPEAT! KREE FRONTIER! THIS IS THE STARJAMMER!

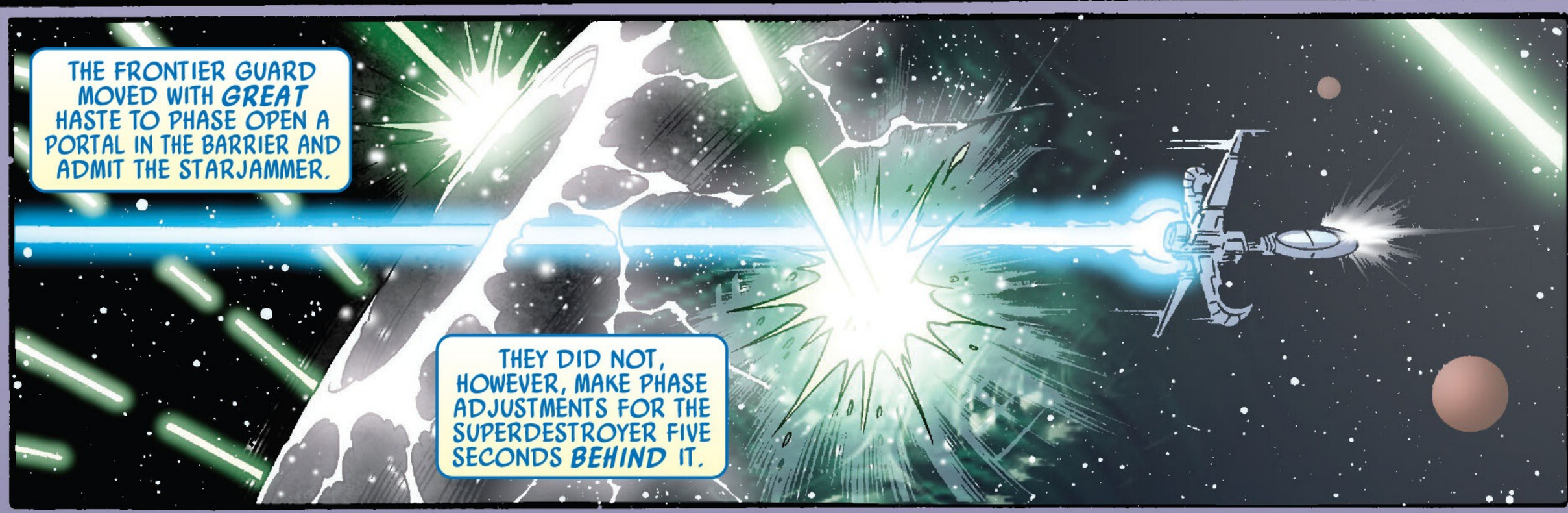
WE ARE INBOUND *SUPERLUMINAL*! REQUEST YOU RAISE YOUR BORDER SHIELD *NOW*!

ZERO RESPONSE! *NOTHING*!

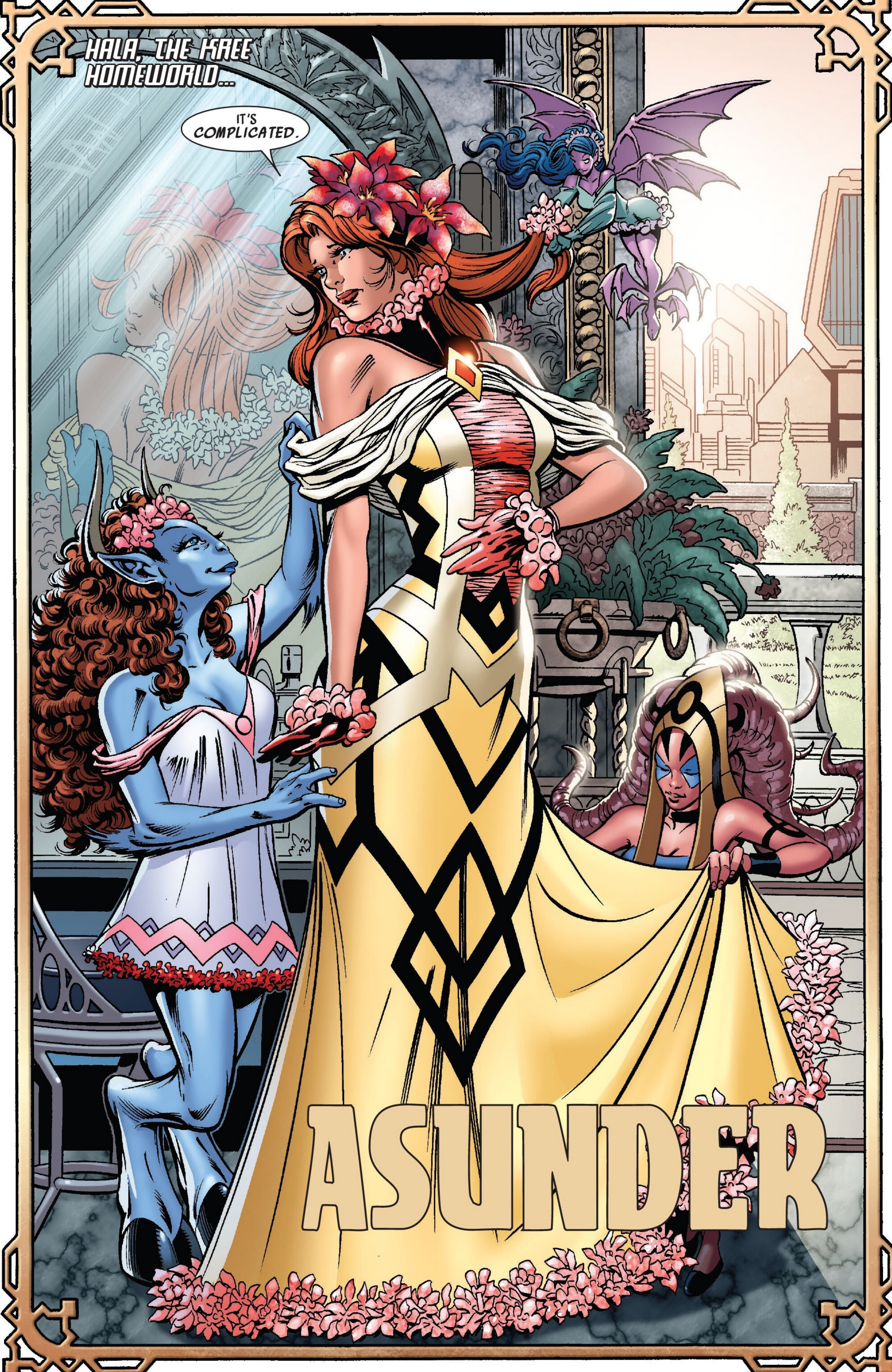
THEY BURNED IN TOWARDS THE BARRIER SURROUNDING KREE SPACE AT VELOCITIES THAT TESTED THE TOLERANCES OF THEIR SHIP'S DRIVEFRAME.

AS *USUAL*, YOU SEE, DANGER WAS AT THEIR HEELS.

THE SHI'AR SUPERDESTROYER *DIVINE PRINCIPLES OF IMMOLATION* HAD FOUND THEM.
TO THE SHI'AR, THE STARJAMMERS WERE ABHORRED DISSIDENTS AND TERRORISTS.
TARGET SHIP WILL REACH THE FRONTIER IN THIRTY-SIX SECONDS, LORD.
AND HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU NEED TO GET A *WEAPONS-LOCK?*
BARRIER'S *STILL* SOLID, HAVOK.
HRM. WE'RE ALL GOING TO WIND UP *VERY* TALL AND *VERY* THIN.
KREE FRONTIER, THIS IS THE *STARJAMMER!* I REPEAT--
GIVE ME *THAT*, ALEX.
KREE FRONTIER, THIS IS *LORNA DANE* ABOARD THE STARJAMMER.
I AM SISTER-IN-LAW TO *CRYSTAL AMAQUELIN MAXIMOFF* OF THE ATTILAN ROYAL FAMILY.
I AM HERE TO ATTEND THE *MARRIAGE* OF CRYSTAL AND RONAN THE ACCUSER. I REQUEST YOU LET US THROUGH THE BARRIER *WITHOUT* DELAY.
WELL, LET'S HOPE OUR NAMES ARE ON THE GUEST LIST.


THE FRONTIER GUARD MOVED WITH GREAT HASTE TO PHASE OPEN A PORTAL IN THE BARRIER AND ADMIT THE STARJAMMER.
THEY DID NOT, HOWEVER, MAKE PHASE ADJUSTMENTS FOR THE SUPERDESTROYER FIVE SECONDS BEHIND IT.

LORD... MY LORD!
OH SHARRA'S T--
AND THAT WAS HOW THE STARJAMMERS CAME TO MY WEDDING.


HALA, THE KREE HOMEWORLD...
IT'S COMPLICATED.
ASUNDER

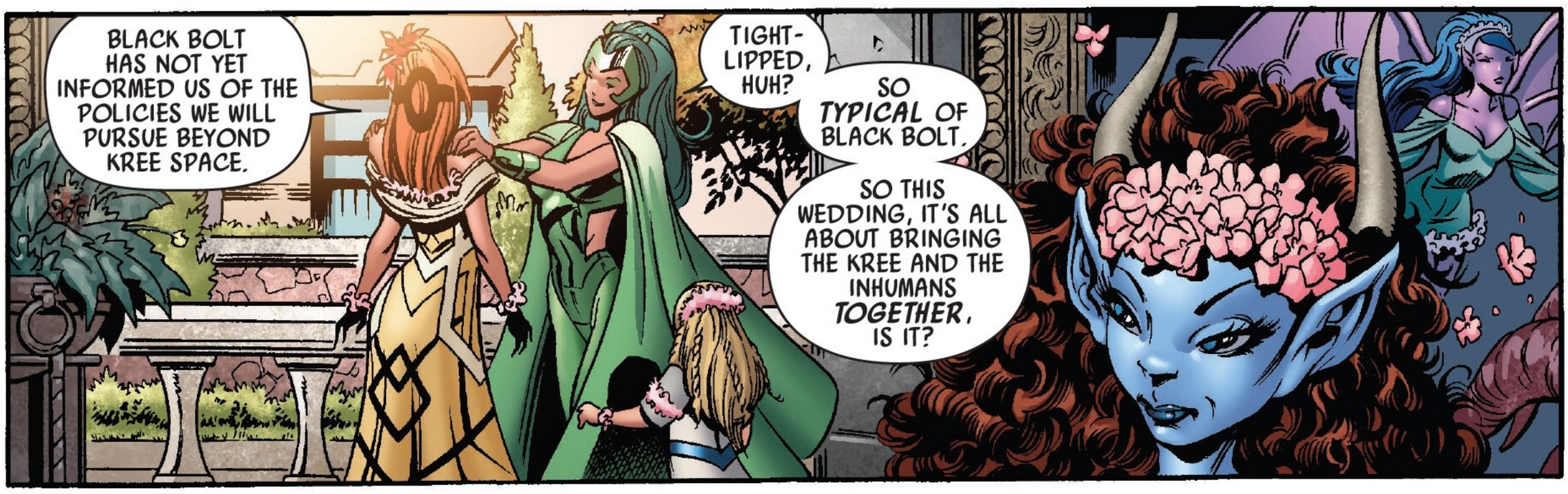
I FIGURED THAT MUCH, CRYSTAL.
YOU'RE MARRYING RONAN THE ACCUSER.
LET'S JUST HEAR THAT IN ITALICS.
RONAN.
THE ACCUSER.
LORNA, THINGS HAVE CHANGED SINCE WE LAST MET.
THEY'VE CHANGED A LOT.

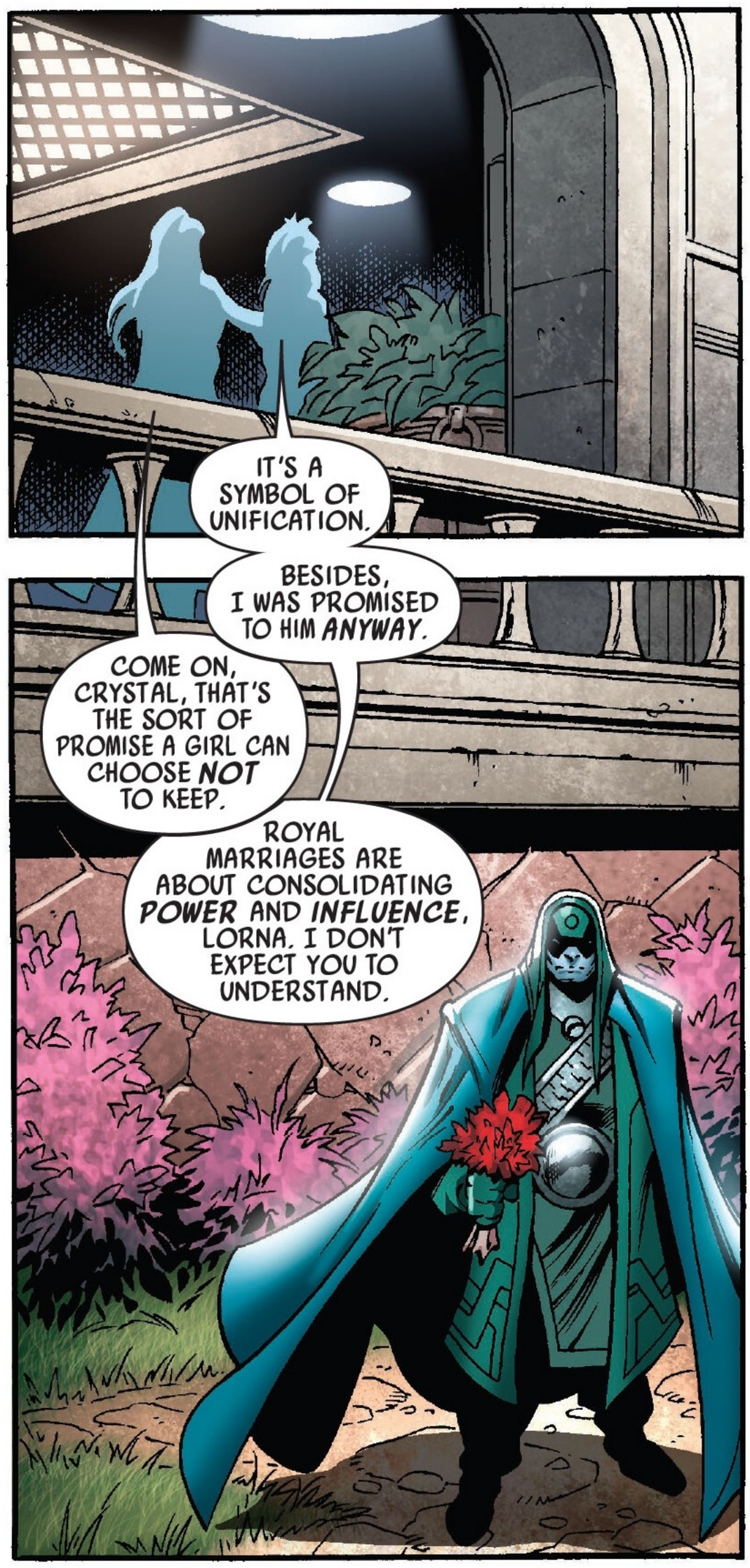
AGAIN, I FIGURED SO. LUNA'S GROWN SO BIG, HAVEN'T YOU, LUNA?
BIG AND TALL, AUNTIE LORNA!
AND THE CITY OF ATTILAN IS PARKED ON THE KREE HOMEWORLD, AND BLACK BOLT HAS APPARENTLY BECOME KING OF THE KREE.
PLUS, YOU'RE GETTING HITCHED TO RONAN.
THE ACCUSER.

STOP SAYING IT LIKE THAT!
THINGS HAVE CHANGED. THE INHUMANS ARE NOT GOING TO BE VICTIMS ANYMORE.
WE ARE TAKING CHARGE OF OUR OWN DESTINY.
THAT SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING YOU'VE BEEN COACHED TO SAY.

WELL, IT'S NOT. WE SHOULD HAVE BECOME THIS DECISIVE YEARS AGO.
GENERATIONS BACK, THE KREE BUILT US TO BE THEIR ELITE. SO BE IT.
WE WILL LEAD THEM, AND HELP THEM TO SHAPE A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL FUTURE.

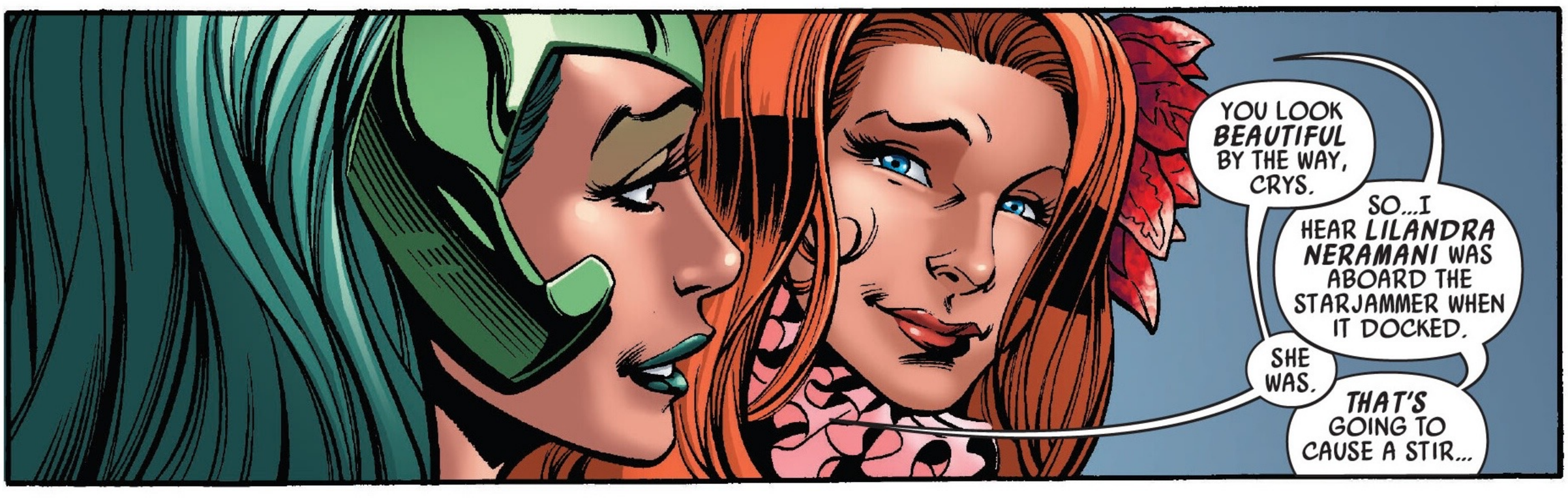
WE'VE BEEN A ROYAL FAMILY FOR A LONG TIME, LORNA. WE'RE VERY GOOD AT IT.
IT'S ABOUT TIME WE HAD SOMEONE TO RULE.
AND DO WHAT? CONQUER THE GALAXY?
THE LIST OF PEOPLE WHO WON'T LIKE THAT STARTS WITH THE SHI'AR.


BLACK BOLT HAS NOT YET INFORMED US OF THE POLICIES WE WILL PURSUE BEYOND KREE SPACE.
TIGHT-LIPPED, HUH?
SO *TYPICAL* OF BLACK BOLT.
SO THIS WEDDING, IT'S ALL ABOUT BRINGING THE KREE AND THE INHUMANS *TOGETHER*, IS IT?


IT'S A SYMBOL OF UNIFICATION.
BESIDES, I WAS PROMISED TO HIM *ANYWAY*.
COME ON, CRYSTAL, THAT'S THE SORT OF PROMISE A GIRL CAN CHOOSE *NOT* TO KEEP.
ROYAL MARRIAGES ARE ABOUT CONSOLIDATING *POWER* AND *INFLUENCE*, LORNA. I DON'T EXPECT YOU TO UNDERSTAND.

GOSH, NO, IT'S *QUITE* BEYOND AN IGNORANT PEASANT LIKE *ME*.
LORNA, I DIDN'T MEAN IT LIKE *THAT*.
I'M NOT MARRYING HIM FOR *LOVE*.

IT'S ABOUT *DUTY*. IT'S ABOUT *STATE CEREMONY*. IT'S ABOUT LIFTING THE MORALE OF THE *PEOPLE*.
NEITHER I *NOR* THE ACCUSER ARE FOOLISH ENOUGH TO THINK IT REPRESENTS ANY KIND OF *PERSONAL* RELATIONSHIP.


YOU LOOK *BEAUTIFUL* BY THE WAY, CRYS.
SO...I HEAR *LILANDRA NERAMANI* WAS ABOARD THE STARJAMMER WHEN IT DOCKED.
SHE WAS.
THAT'S GOING TO CAUSE A STIR...

"...THE DEPOSED *EMPRESS* OF THE SHI'AR ATTENDING A *KREE* ROYAL WEDDING."

MY LORD BLACK BOLT. I AM *LILANDRA NERAMANI*, ONCE GLORIANA MAJESTRIX-SHI'AR OF THE AERIE, NOW AN EXILE.

I RESPECTFULLY ASK THE KREE EMPIRE FOR *ASYLUM*.

HANG *ON*. IF WE SAY *YES*, WON'T IT MAKE THAT PSYCHOPATH VULCAN *JOLLY* ANNOYED WITH US?

PLEASE EXCUSE THE UNSOLICITED *POLITICAL COMMENTARY*, OFFERED BY THE KING'S BROTHER, MAXIMUS.

I SPEAK FOR BLACK BOLT.

THEN I THROW MYSELF UPON *YOUR* MERCY, LADY MEDUSA.

THE INHUMANS AND THE KREE ARE CONJOINING THEIR STRENGTHS UNDER YOUR HUSBAND'S BENEVOLENT RULE.

I BELIEVE YOU CAN OFFER ME *SANCTUARY* FROM VULCAN'S BRUTAL REGIME.

IN TIME, I HOPE YOU MAY EVEN *OPPOSE* HIM.

CONFLICT WITH THE MIGHTY SHI'AR IS *NOT* SOMETHING WE INTEND TO PURSUE, LILANDRA.

FORGIVE ME, YOU MAY NOT BE GIVEN A *CHOICE*, WHETHER YOU GRANT ME ASYLUM OR NOT.

VULCAN HAS NEVER SEEN A TRACT OF SPACE THAT HE DIDN'T THINK WOULD LOOK *BETTER* WITH *HIS* FLAG FLYING OVER IT.

SO WE HAVE HEARD.

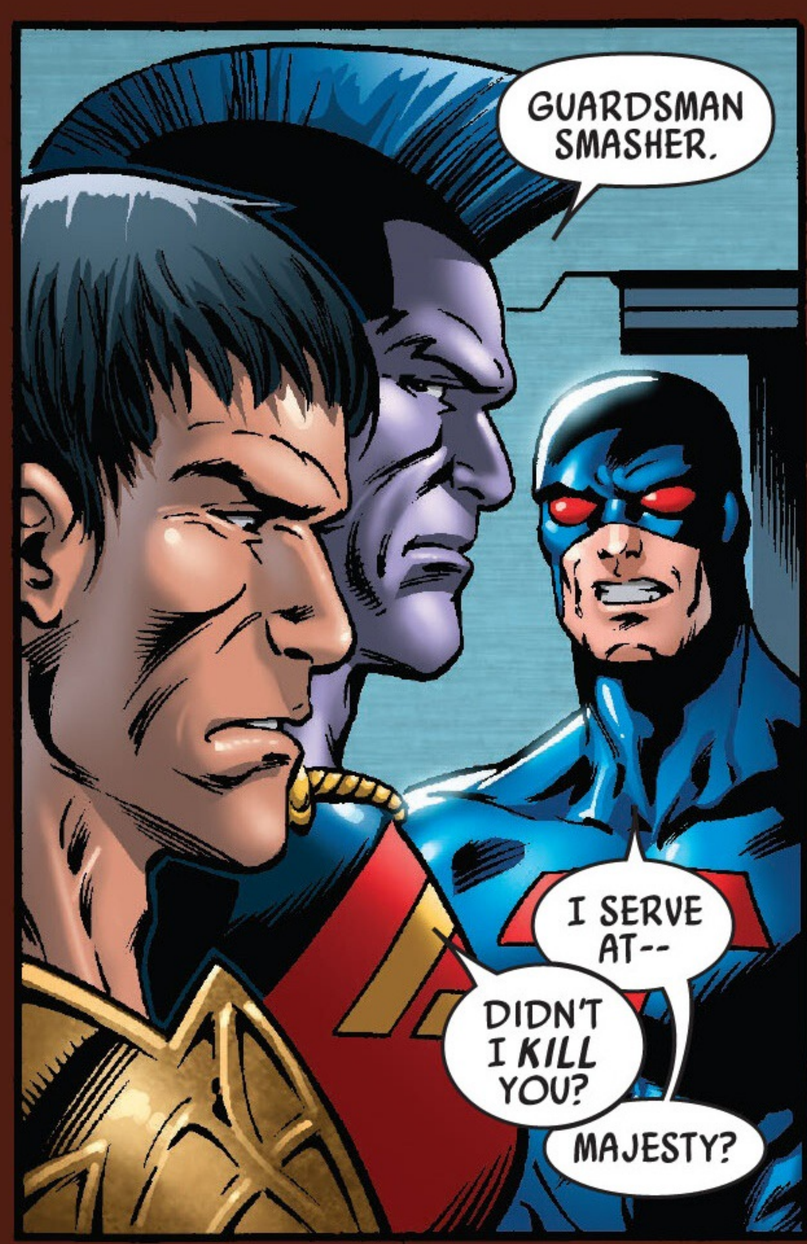
THEN BE *WARNED*. THE IMPERIAL GUARD--

THE IMPERIAL GUARD, FOR *ALL* ITS REPUTATION, HAS NEVER MET THE *NEW INHUMAN ELITE*.

SHI'AR FLAGSHIP HAMMER II
GUARDSMAN NEUTRON.
I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF EMPEROR VULCAN.

GUARDSMAN PLUTONIA.
I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF EMPEROR VULCAN.

GUARDSMAN MANTA.
I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF EMPEROR VULCAN.


GUARDSMAN SMASHER.
I SERVE AT--
DIDN'T I KILL YOU?
MAJESTY?

SALAC TUUR HAS BEEN RECRUITED TO REPLACE THE LATE VRIL ROKK.
OKAY, MY MISTAKE. CARRY ON.

GUARDSMAN SQUORM.
I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF EMPEROR VULCAN.
YES, YES. VERY GOOD.

GUARDSMAN STARBOLT.
I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF EMPEROR VULCAN.

GUARDSMAN MENTOR.
I S--
YEAH, YEAH, YEAH. I'M BORED NOW.
ARE WE GOOD TO GO?

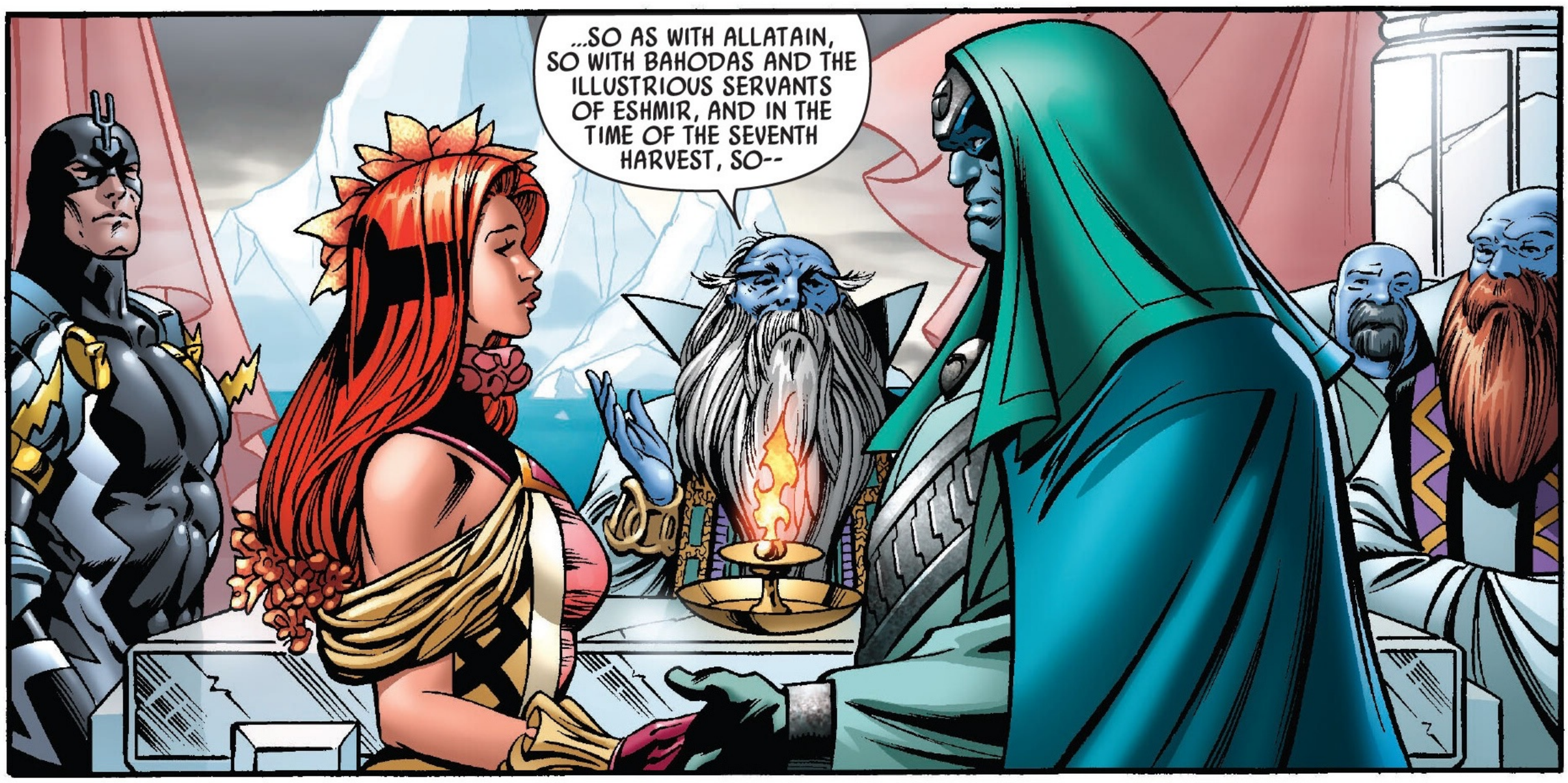
ALL FLIGHT PATCHES ARE ENABLED, AND ALL GUARDSMAN POWERS AND SKILL SETS ARE CERTIFIED COMBAT READY.
STRIKE COORDINATES HAVE BEEN LOCKED INTO THE DEEP-RANGE TELEPARTURE SYSTEM AND--
WHAT GUARDSMAN MENTOR MEANS, MY EMPEROR...

...IS THE IMPERIAL GUARD IS READY TO FIGHT TO THE DEATH AT YOUR COMMAND.
I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF THE EMPEROR. I ALWAYS HAVE.
I AM PRAETOR OF THE SHI'AR IMPERIAL GUARD. I AM KALLARK, THE LAST SON OF STRONTIA. I AM GLADIATOR.
LIKE MANY ADOPTED SONS, I AM FIERCELY DEVOTED.
MAJESTOR OR MAJESTRIX, IT DOESN'T MATTER. I SERVE THEM ALL, THE GOOD AND THE BAD. THEY COME AND GO, THE GREAT AND THE WORTHY, THE WEAK AND THE TYRANNICAL.
I AM THE ONE CONSTANT.
LOYALTY IS WHAT I DO. LOYALTY TO THE OFFICE, NOT THE PERSON.
LOYALTY IS ALL THAT DEFINES ME.
NO MATTER WHAT MY PRIVATE OPINIONS OF THE ONE I SERVE.
NO MATTER THAT HE IS NOT SHI'AR BORN, BUT RATHER A MUTANT HUMAN USURPER DRIVEN BY HIS OWN AMBITIONS.
INTELFEED FROM THE KREE HOMEWORLD CONFIRMS THE CEREMONY IS NOW UNDERWAY, MAJESTOR.
WHAT DO YOU THINK, PRAETOR?
WON'T THEY LOVE MY WEDDING PRESENT?
I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF THE EMPEROR.

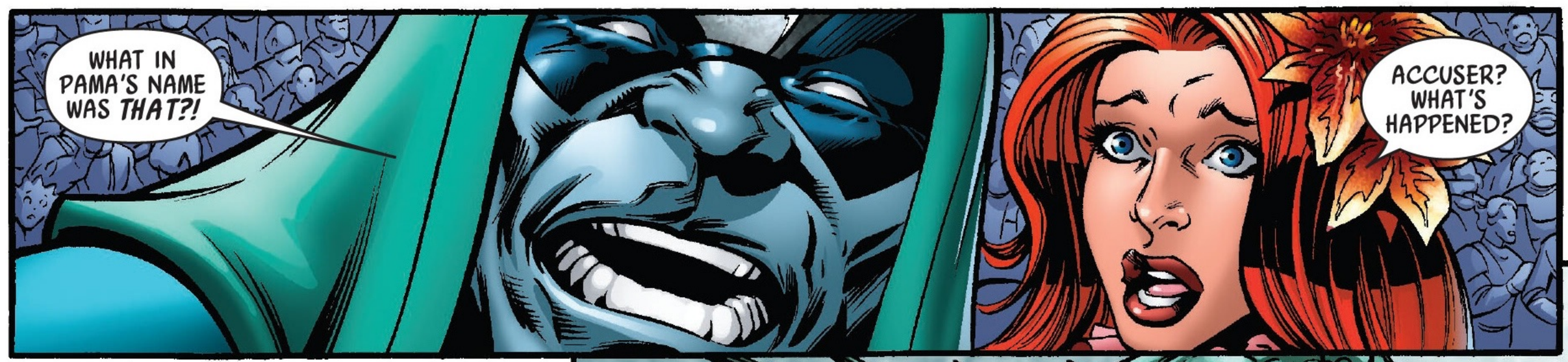
TODAY I SERVE HIM BY PARTICIPATING IN THE INVASION OF THE KREE STELLAR EMPIRE.
MOST OF THE WORK WILL BE UNDERTAKEN BY THE IMPERIAL FLEET. THEY WILL BEGIN A PURIFICATION CAMPAIGN OF THE KREE OUTWORLDS AS SOON AS THE BARRIER COMES DOWN.
THE IMPERIAL GUARD WILL BE EMPLOYED FOR A MORE SPECIFIC PURPOSE. AN EHS'TYL ASSAULT.
INTELFEED TELLS US THAT THE KREE, BY TRADITION, CONDUCT THEIR DYNASTIC CEREMONIES ON THE GON-KET GLACIER NEAR THE SOUTHERN POLE OF THE HOMEWORLD, HALA.
KREE ICESMITHS CARVE THE GLACIER INTO A RITUAL PALACE. AIRSHIPS FERRY IN A HUNDRED THOUSAND GUESTS.

MANY OF THEM ARE DELEGATES FROM THE INTERSTELLAR COMMUNITY.
NO SHI'AR ENVOY HAS BEEN INVITED.
EHS'TYL, BY THE WAY, IS A SHI'AR WORD THAT MEANS, LITERALLY, "BURSTING CRANIUM."
HEADSHOT, IF YOU WILL.

THE BABEL SPIRE IN HALA'S PRINCIPAL CITY...
SIRE? EXCUSE ME, SIRE? HELLO?
SIRE, AREN'T YOU GOHMEN AHUUD OF THE AAKONIAN DELEGATION?
SIRE, YOU SHOULD BE AT THE GLACIER BY NOW. THE CEREMONY'S BEGUN.
THIS IS THE FAMOUS SPIRE, IS IT?
THE SPIRE THAT GENERATES YOUR EMPIRE'S PROTECTIVE BARRIER?
HAS HE BEEN DRINKING?
SIRE, YOU'RE MISSING THE WEDDING.
I KNOW.
I'VE GOT MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO.
HOLY PAMA! SHAPESHIFTER! SHAPESHIFTER!
I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF EMPEROR VULCAN.
CLNK


...SO AS WITH ALLATAIN, SO WITH BAHODAS AND THE ILLUSTRIOUS SERVANTS OF ESHMIR, AND IN THE TIME OF THE SEVENTH HARVEST, SO--

...


WHAT IN PAMA'S NAME WAS THAT?!
ACCUSER? WHAT'S HAPPENED?

OH!
RACHEL?
HUGE. NHH. HUGE HUGE HUGE TELEPORT BURST!

SHARRA AND K'YTHRI...
HE WOULDN'T DARE.

TELEPARTURE SYSTEM DROPS US SMACK OVER THE GLACIER.
EHS'TYL BEGINS.

IMPERIAL SHI'AR FLEET...

MAJESTY, THE KREE SHIELD BARRIER IS DOWN. THE INVASION HAS COMMENCED.

BATTLEGROUP THREE HAS BEGUN ORBITAL BOMBARDMENT OF THE KREE OUTWORLDS FEH-NEN, DISRADI AND JIR-PON.

BATTLEGROUP NINE HAS LANDED GROUND FORCES TO TAKE THE KREE COLONIES AT CYBAL MAGNA AND 66 BETA TAU.

FLEET TASKFORCE WOLFSPIDER HAS ENGAGED KREE NAVY SQUADRONS IN THE GULF OF SARENTA.

BATTLEGROUP TWO IS ASSULTING RADIUS EIGHTEEN. COMMANDER FE'EYHT REQUESTS PERMISSION TO...TO USE ***NEGA-BOMBS.***

WHAT DO ***YOU*** THINK, ADMIRAL KA'ARDUM?

I THINK NEGA-BOMBS ARE THE MOST ***ABOMINABLE*** DEVICES WE HAVE EVER MANUFACTURED, MAJESTY.

HMMM. ME ***TOO.*** LET'S USE ***LOTS*** OF THEM.

THIS INVASION STUFF IS ALL WELL AND GOOD, ADMIRAL, BUT TELL ME WHAT I ***REALLY*** WANT TO HEAR...

"...HOW FARES MY IMPERIAL GUARD?"
SHOCKWAVE INSERTION. OUR SONIC BOOMS SOUND LIKE THE GLACIER JUST SNAPPED IN HALF.
THE CONCUSSION OVERPRESSURE PULPS ORGANS AND PULVERIZES BONE.
SKWEEEE--
BUT NOT EVERYTHING WE HAVE TO KILL HERE IS ALIVE.
THE KREE SENTRIES ARE PROFICIENT COMBAT SYSTEMS SO WE JUST DON'T GIVE THEM TIME TO TARGET-LOCK.
OH THOSE ☠☠☠☠☠☠☠☠!
AUNTIE LORNA! AUNTIE LORNA!
LOCKJAW! GET LUNA OUT OF HERE! GET HER OUT OF HERE NOW!
HOW CAN VULCAN BE MY BROTHER, LORNA? HOW CAN I BE RELATED TO ANYONE WHO COULD ORCHESTRATE THIS?

AND THEN WE'RE AMONGST THEM.
MY INSTRUCTION TO THE GUARD WAS NO QUARTER. THIS IS NOT A MOMENT FOR HOLDING BACK.
SO THEY DO NOT.
BUT OUR ENEMY IS NOT TOOTHLESS.
THEIR ECHO WEAPONS, WHICH DRAW POWER FROM CAPACITORS STORING THE WHISPERS OF THEIR KING, ARE FORMIDABLE.
I LOSE NIGHTSIDE IN THE FIRST FIFTEEN SECONDS.

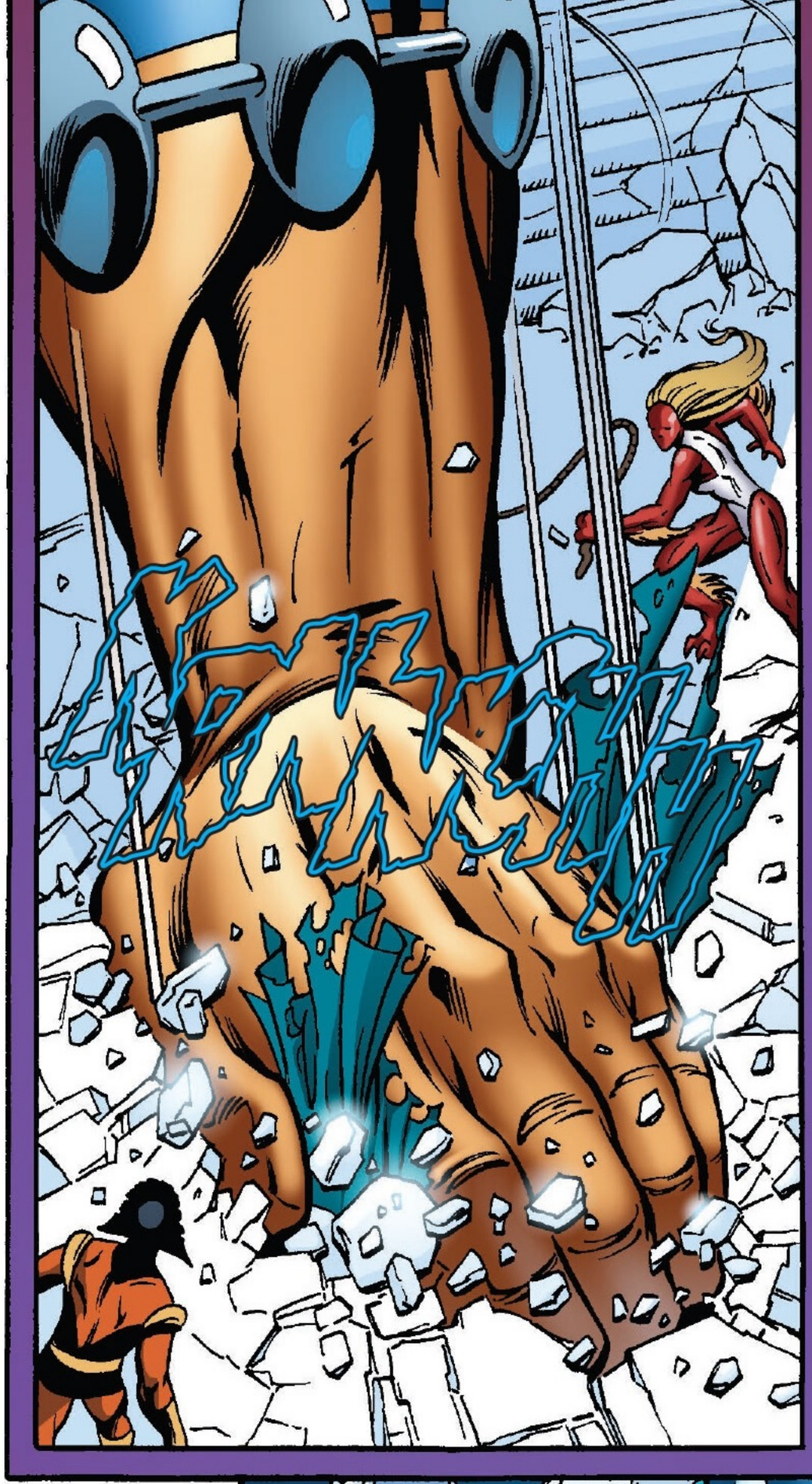
KRCK
A MOMENT LATER, I REALIZE I WILL BE FORCED TO FIND ANOTHER RECRUIT TO FILL THE SMASHER UNIFORM.
FOR THE MOST PART, OUR ENEMY IS TOO NUMB WITH SURPRISE TO COMPOSE A PROPER DEFENSE.
FOR THE MOST PART.

WHITE NOISE! NOW!
SHE HITS HIM WITH A CONE OF NOISE-CANCELLING SONICS. HER POWER'S NOT ON HIS SCALE, BUT IT'S ENOUGH TO STUN HIM FOR A SECOND.
WHAT HAVE YOU GOT TO SAY TO THAT, EH, YOUR MAJESTY?

KRA-BOOM
BLACK BOLT!
THE KING IS DOWN!
AARRRGGHHH!
AND SO ARE YOU, YOU UGLY ☠☠☠☠!
VZARRRRR

CH'OD! THIS WAY!
HRM! WATCH YOUR BACK, LADY!
HELLO, MY MAJESTY.
NGHH!
VOYAGER, A JUMP-DOOR, PLEASE.
SZKK!
NO!
NO! NO, NO, NO!
LILANDR-
-AAAARGH!
ZZWRPP

AHHH!
CRYSTAL!
FWOOSH
GET OFF HER!
GHHK
NNNGH! FACE ME FROM THE FRONT, YOU BACKSTABBING JACKAL!
SHRRPP
NGHHK!



ARE WE DONE HERE, PRAETOR?

I BELIEVE WE'VE MADE OUR POINT.
EXECUTE TELEPARTURE BOUNCE.
WMRX

ZZZZMMMMMMMMMMMM
THEY BEAMED OUT! THEY'VE GONE!
HAVOK, THEY'VE TAKEN LILANDRA!
IS CH'OD'S FAULT! THEY HAVE OUR EMP--
NHHH! GNNGG!
OH, GODS PRESERVE US...
ACCUSER!
TODAY YOU HAVE MADE A MORTAL ERROR, SHI'AR...

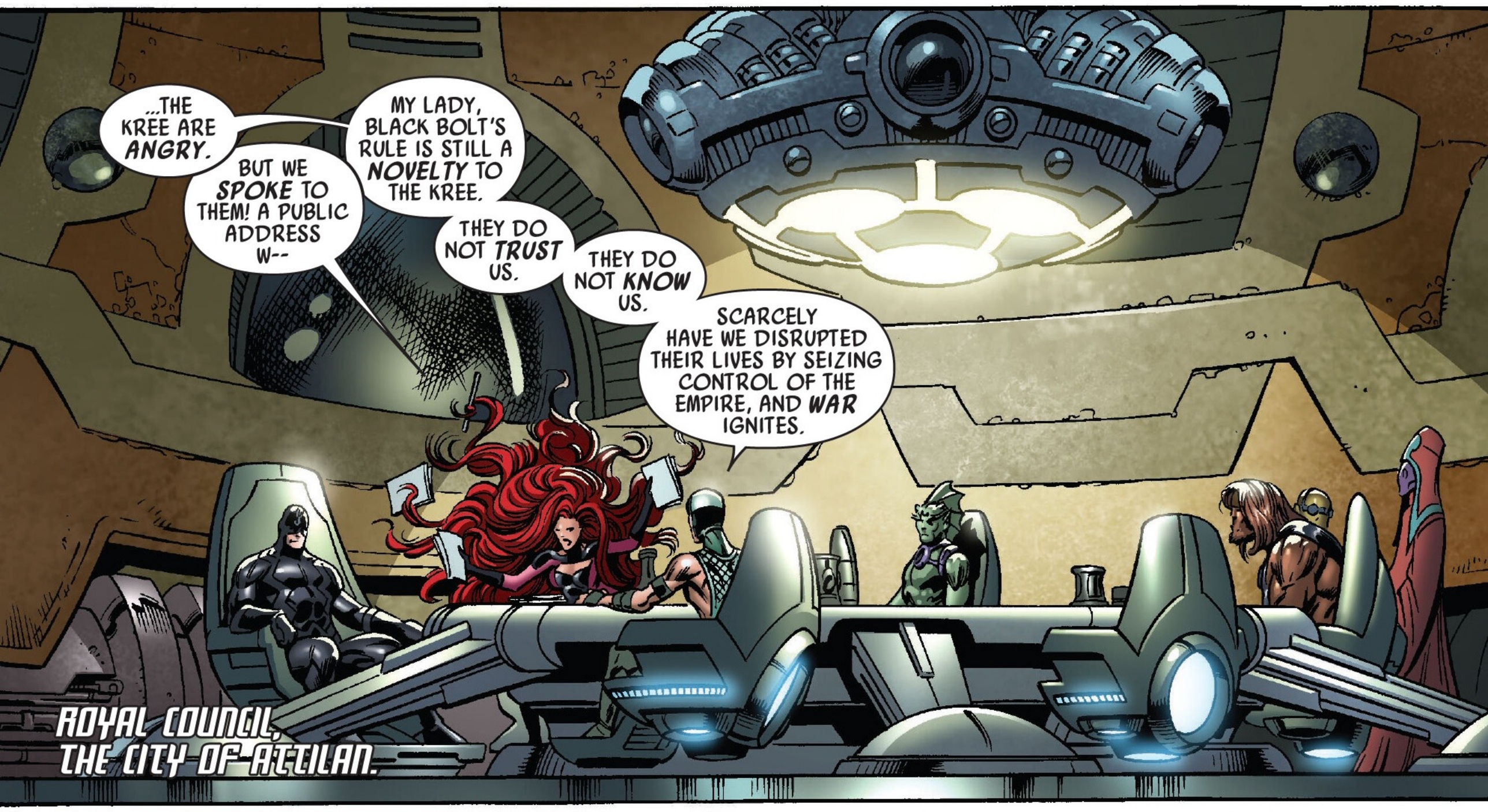
...AND YOU SHALL PAY IN BLOOD!

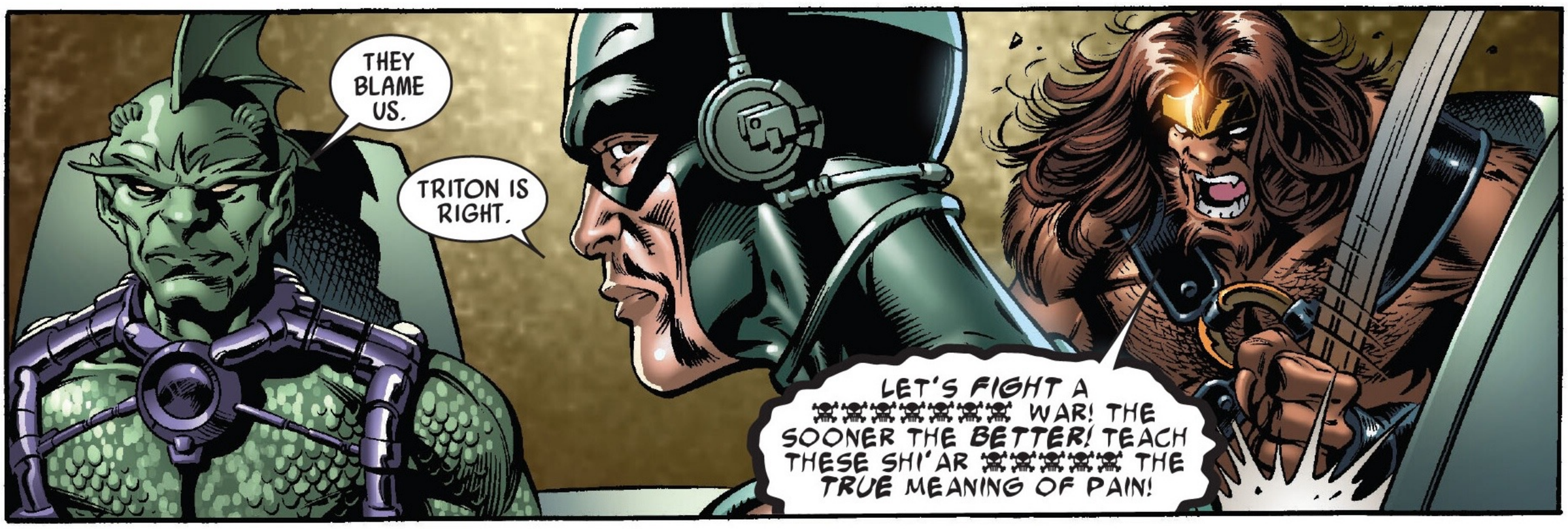
WAR OF KINGS 2

RADIUS EIGHTEEN MELTS ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WAR BETWEEN THE SHI'AR AND THE KREE.
THIS IS WHAT A NEGA-BOMB DOES.
I WATCH THE WORLD CREMATE VIA INTELFEED ON THE BRIDGE OF MY EMPEROR'S FLAGSHIP.
I AM ABOUT TO DELIVER THE REBEL EMPRESS LILANDRA TO HIM.
THE NEGA-BOMBINGS HAVE PUT HIM IN A GOOD MOOD.
I AM GLADIATOR, PRAETOR OF THE SHI'AR IMPERIAL GUARD, AND I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF EMPEROR VULCAN.
EVERY LAST ONE OF THEM

HAVE YOU BROUGHT HER TO ME, PRAETOR?
I HAVE, MY EMPEROR. AS YOU ORDERED.
GUARDSMEN, BRING HER FORWARD!
LILANDRA NERAMANI. SWEET LILANDRA. SWEET LITTLE ANDRA.
NOTHING TO SAY?
NOT TO YOU, MONSTER.
HMM. HOW I LOVE IT WHEN WE FLIRT.
WELL IF YOU'RE NOT IN THE MOOD TO TALK, LET'S JUST WATCH WORLDS BURN INSTEAD.
JUST ME AND YOU. THE EMPEROR OF ALL SHI'AR SPACE, AND THE PRETENDER WITCH WHO THINKS SHE'S BETTER THAN HIM.
COME ON! THEY'RE ONLY KREE WORLDS, AND THEY BURN SO VERY PRETTY WHEN YOU DROP A NEGA-BOMB ON THEM.
IT'LL GIVE US SOMETHING TO DO BEFORE THE END OF YOUR LIFE.

CITIZENS OF THE KREE EMPIRE, I AM MEDUSA, AND I SPEAK FOR BLACK BOLT.
MANY OF YOU WILL KNOW THAT WE HAVE SUFFERED AN UNPROVOKED ASSAULT BY THE FORCES OF THE SHI'AR.
THE SHIELD THAT ONCE PROTECTED OUR STAR SYSTEM HAS FALLEN. SHI'AR WARSHIPS HAVE STRUCK AT MANY OUTWORLDS AND FRONTIER COLONIES.
THE ROYAL WEDDING AT THE GON-KET GLACIER WAS INTERRUPTED BY A DESPICABLE ATTACK BY THEIR IMPERIAL GUARD.
AS A CONSEQUENCE, A STATE OF WAR EXISTS BETWEEN OUR EMPIRES.
WE IMPLORE YOU TO REMAIN CALM AND TO ATTEND TO YOUR DUTIES.
THE WANTON AGGRESSION OF VULCAN AND THE SHI'AR WILL NOT GO UNANSWERED.
BLACK BOLT HAS PLEDGED TO LEAD THE KREE TOWARDS THEIR IMPERIAL DESTINY, AND THE INHUMANS WILL NOT WAVER IN THEIR DEFENSE OF--
WHNNCH
HALA, CAPITAL WORLD OF THE KREE STELLAR EMPIRE.
INHUMANS! YOU BROUGHT THIS UPON US!
OUT! OUT! OUT!
"MASS UNREST IS REPORTED ACROSS HALA AND SEVERAL OF THE HEARTWORLDS...."


...THE KREE ARE ANGRY.
BUT WE SPOKE TO THEM! A PUBLIC ADDRESS W--
MY LADY, BLACK BOLT'S RULE IS STILL A NOVELTY TO THE KREE.
THEY DO NOT TRUST US.
THEY DO NOT KNOW US.
SCARCELY HAVE WE DISRUPTED THEIR LIVES BY SEIZING CONTROL OF THE EMPIRE, AND WAR IGNITES.
ROYAL COUNCIL, THE CITY OF ATTILAN.


THEY BLAME US.
TRITON IS RIGHT.
LET'S FIGHT A ☠☠☠☠☠☠ WAR! THE SOONER THE BETTER! TEACH THESE SHI'AR ☠☠☠☠☠ THE TRUE MEANING OF PAIN!

THAT LEG STILL HURTING YOU, GORGON?
THE HEALER'S FIXED THE BREAK, COUSIN KARNAK, BUT IT'S ITCHY-SORE. MAKES ME IRRITABLE.
A WAR WOULD HELP.

AND SHI'AR BLOOD WILL SPILL! WE WILL TEACH THEM THE PRICE OF CROSSING ATTILAN!
AGREED, BUT WE DO NOT HAVE TIME FOR A WAR. THERE IS TOO MUCH STILL TO ACCOMPLISH.
THE UPLIFT PROGRAM FOR THE KREE ALONE IS SO COMPLEX, WE COULD LOSE YEARS OF LEAD TIME IF WE STOP TO PROSECUTE A LONG-TERM CAMPAIGN.

THEREFORE I PROPOSE WE STRIKE, HARD AND FAST, AND END THIS DISPUTE AS SWIFTLY AND DECISIVELY AS POSSIBLE.
WE MUST BRING THE SHI'AR TO TERMS OR, BETTER STILL, MAUL THEM SO BADLY THEIR MILITARY CAPACITY IS HOBBLED FOR GENERATIONS.

AGREED. NOTHING ELSE IS ACCEPTABLE.
WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO ADVANCE ANY OF OUR GRAND DESIGNS UNTIL THE SHI'AR IMPEDIMENT IS REMOVED.
SO YOU'RE PROPOSING A RIGHTEOUS WAR? A WAR TO END WAR?

THIS AMUSES YOU, BROTHER?
IT JUST SOUNDS LIKE THE SORT OF FALLACY A HUMAN WOULD INVENT.

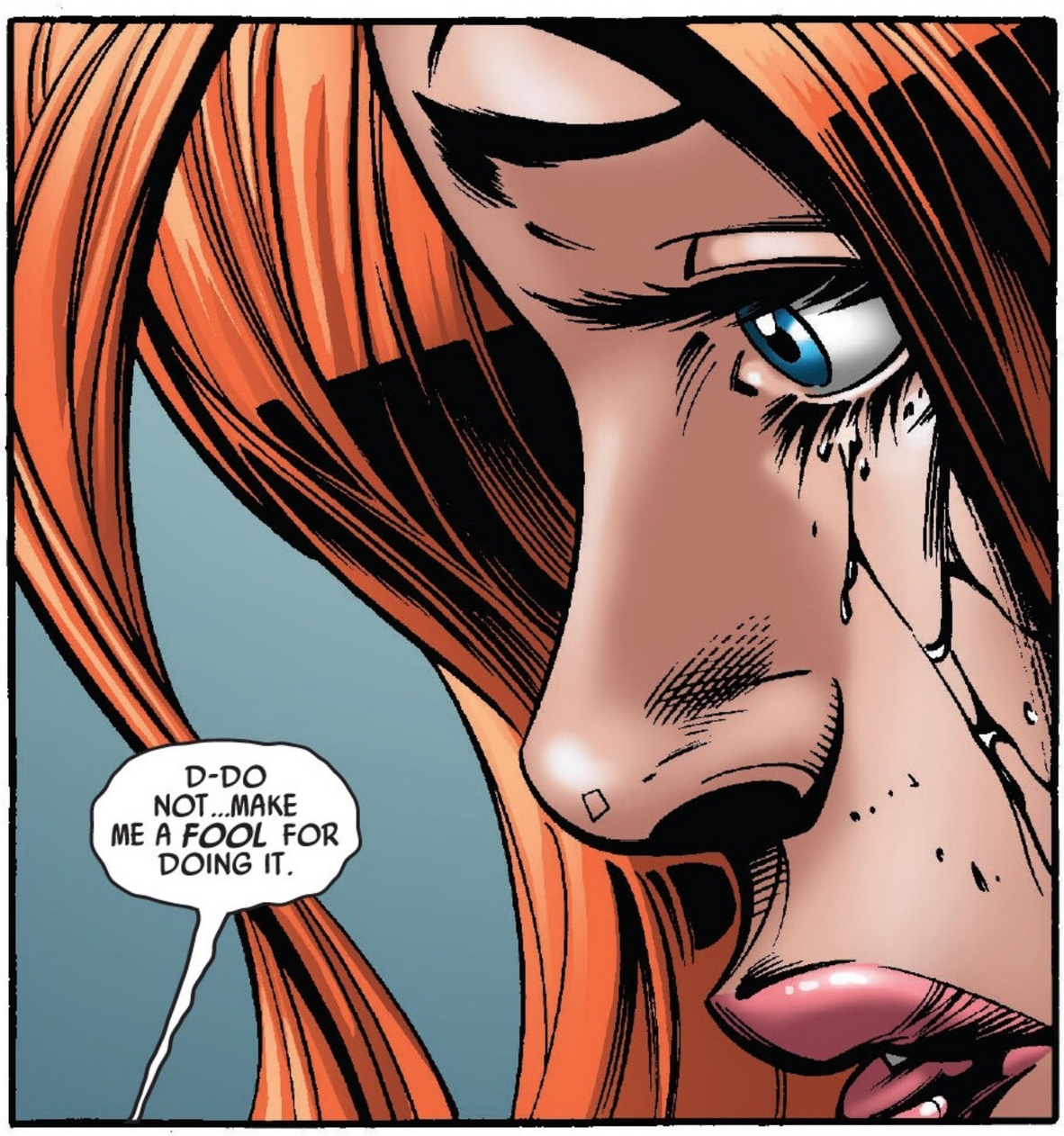
SO HOW DO WE KEEP THE KREE PEOPLE IN LINE?
THEY'VE ENDURED A GREAT DEAL IN THE LAST FEW YEARS. ONE INVASION AFTER ANOTHER. THEY NEED A RALLYING POINT.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE OBVIOUS CANDIDATE FOR THAT ROLE IS NOT IN THE BEST OF HEALTH...

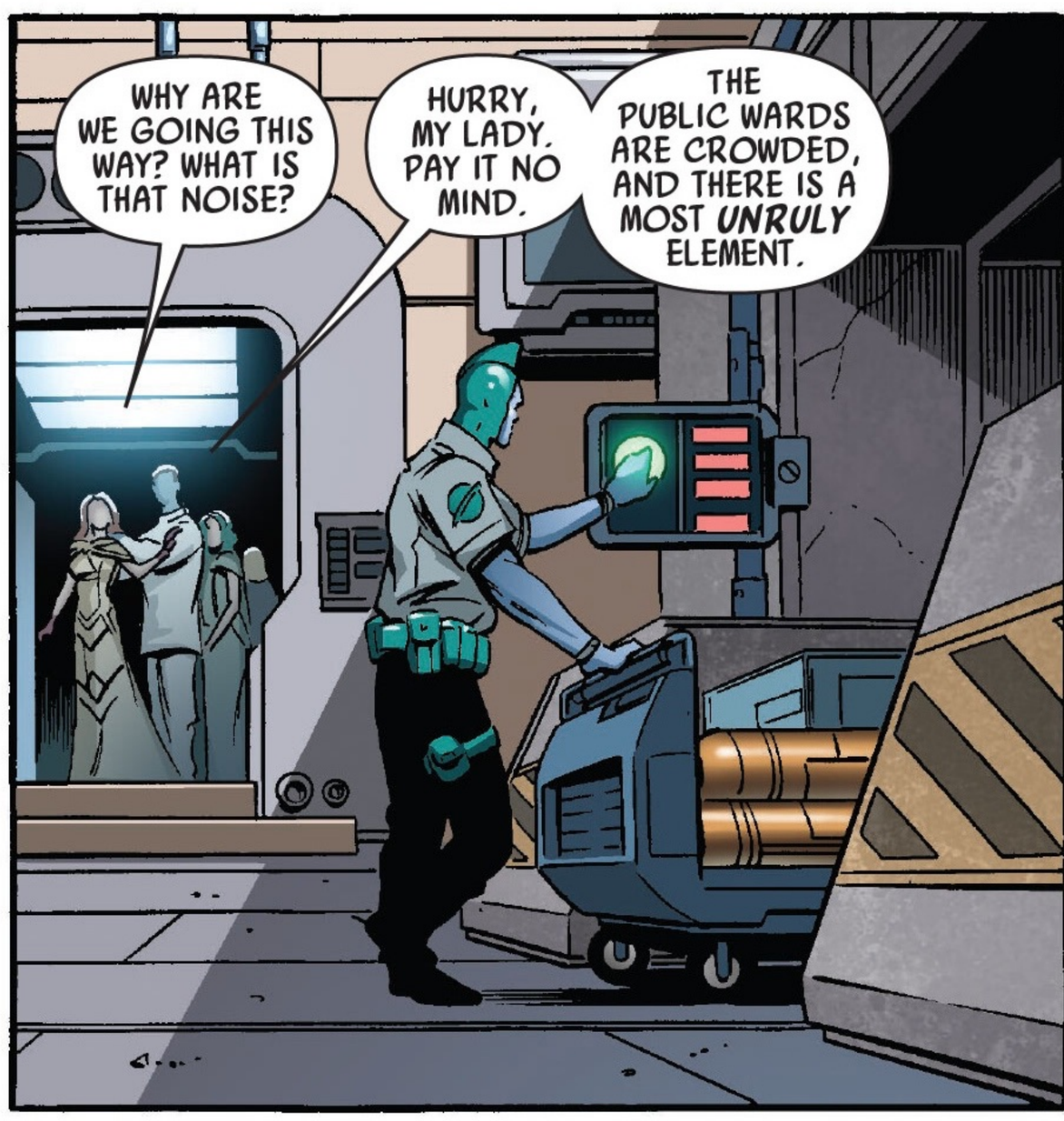
HE SHOULD BE DEAD.
BUT HE CLINGS ON BY SOME FEAT OF STUBBORNNESS. THE HEALERS HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT.
POOR RONAN...
CIVIC INFIRMARY, HALA.
HE IS MY HUSBAND. IT IS QUITE PREPOSTEROUS TO THINK OF HIM IN THOSE TERMS, BUT TECHNICALLY, HE IS.
...THAT'LL TEACH HIM TO MARRY YOU.
LORNA!
SORRY, CRYSTAL.
BUT WHEN THE ENTIRE SHI'AR IMPERIUM INVADES JUST TO STOP HER WEDDING, A GIRL OUGHT TO TAKE IT AS A SIGN.
RONAN IS MY HUSBAND. IT IS A UNION MADE TO CONSECRATE THE FUTURE OF OUR PEOPLES.
I SAY IT WITH NO CONVICTION. MY SISTER-IN-LAW DOES LITTLE TO REASSURE ME, BUT HER TEASING IS JUST AN ATTEMPT TO BREAK THE TENSION.
WHAT IS HAPPENING IS SO BIG. SO MANY PEOPLE DIED YESTERDAY. PLANETS DIED.
LISTEN, CRYSTAL, HAVOK'S GETTING THE STARJAMMER PREPPED FOR LAUNCH.
WE'RE GOING AFTER LILANDRA. WE COULD REALLY USE YOUR TALENTS ON A MISSION LIKE THAT.
I DON'T KNOW. I--

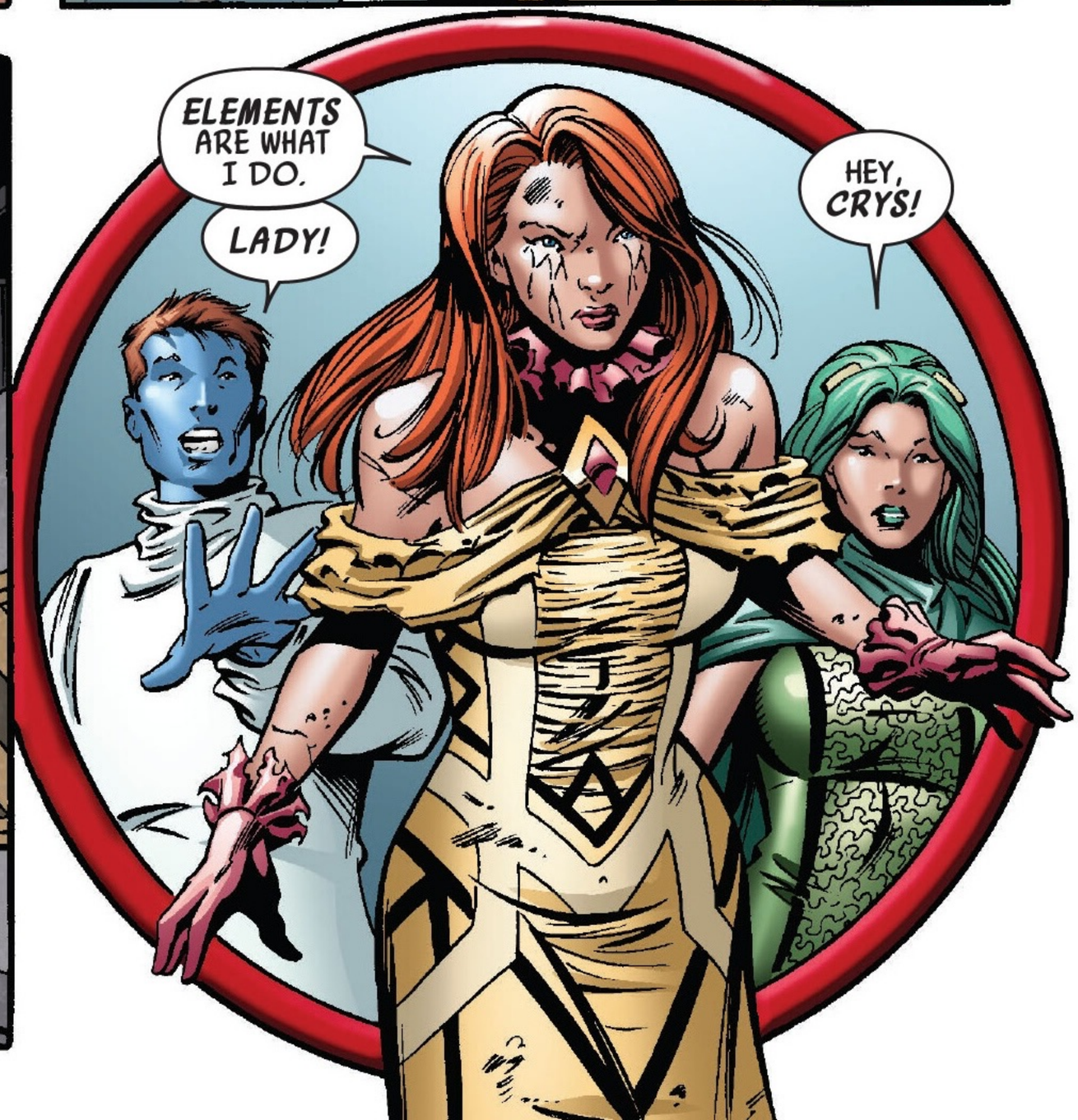
CR-CRYSTAL...
LORD RONAN!
DO NOT EXERT YOURSELF. YOU HAVE BEEN BADLY HURT.
TH-THE KREE...THE KREE PEOPLE...

THEY ARE PRAYING FOR YOUR RETURN TO POWER.
N-NO. I...I WOULD HAVE FOUGHT...YOU INHUMANS...TO THE DEATH...
B-BUT I BELIEVE... Y-YOU ARE OUR... FUTURE...
FOR THAT REASON ALONE... FOR THE KREE...I KNELT TO BLACK BOLT...

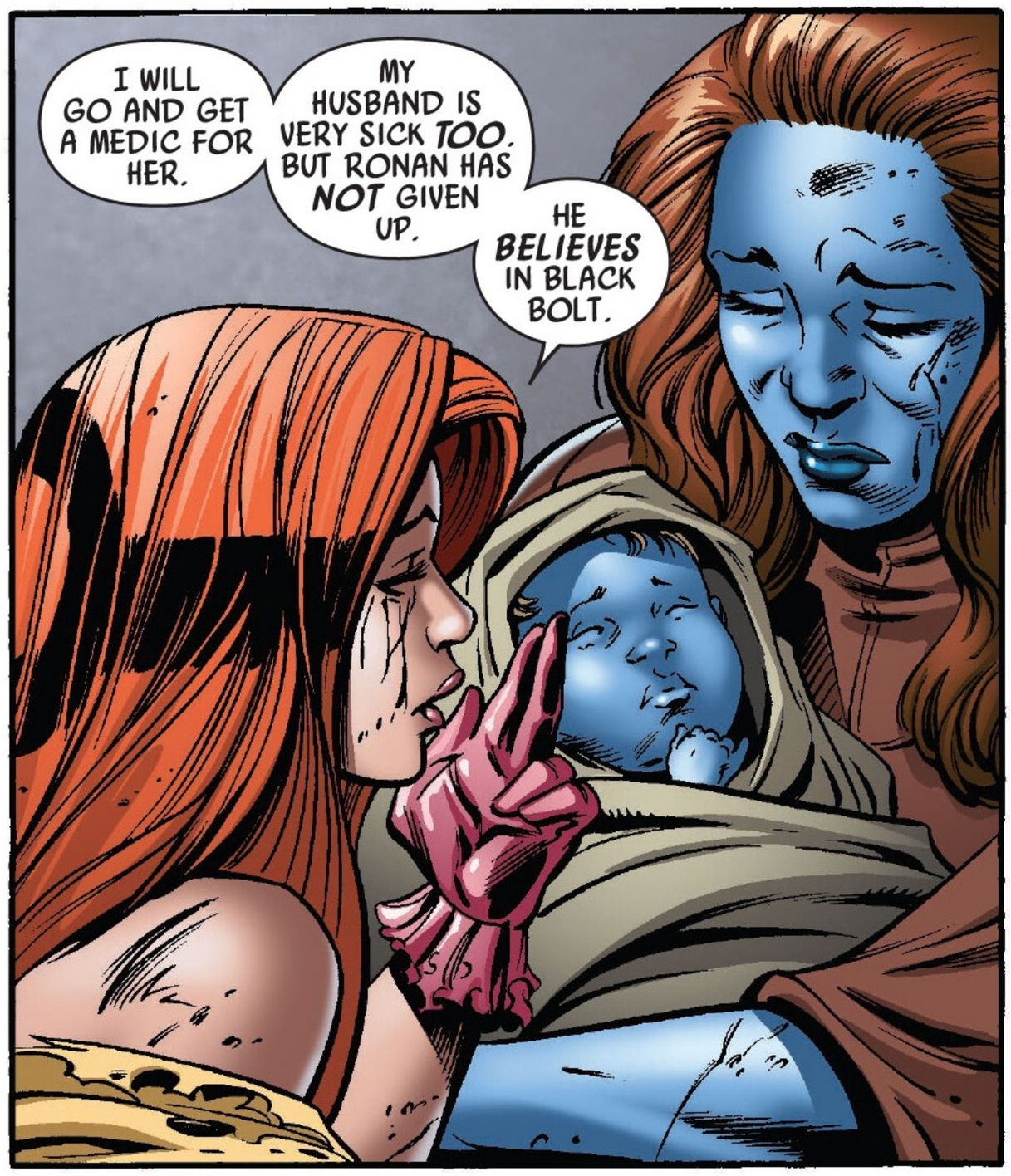

D-DO NOT...MAKE ME A FOOL FOR DOING IT.

PLEASE, THE ACCUSER MUST REST.
BUT--
WE WILL ESCORT YOU BACK TO YOUR TRANSPORT.

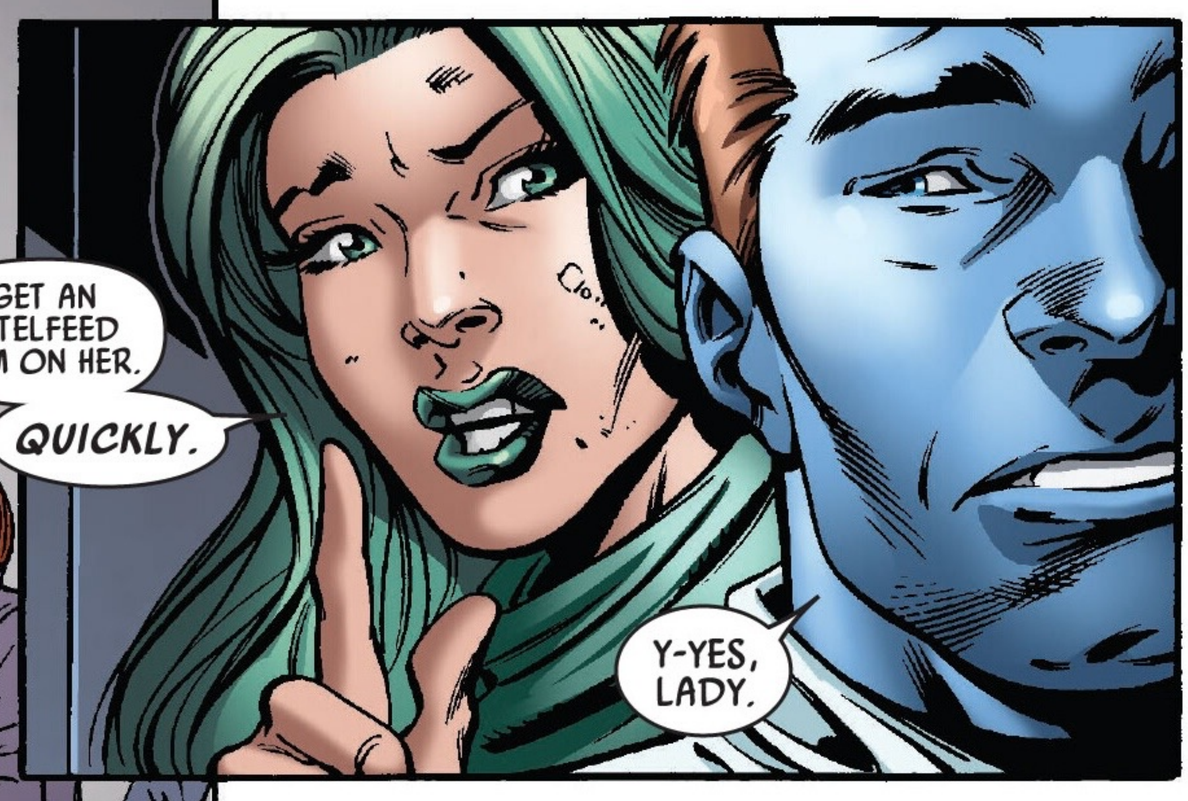

WHY ARE WE GOING THIS WAY? WHAT IS THAT NOISE?
HURRY, MY LADY. PAY IT NO MIND.
THE PUBLIC WARDS ARE CROWDED, AND THERE IS A MOST UNRULY ELEMENT.


ELEMENTS ARE WHAT I DO.
LADY!
HEY, CRYS!

OH.
WHERE IS THE ACCUSER?
LOOK! LOOK, IT'S *HER!*
STILL IN HER GOWN OF MATRIMONY!
HE'S *DEAD*, ISN'T HE?
WHEN WILL THE MEDICS COME? I CAN'T STOP MY FATHER'S BLEEDING.
WHY IS THERE NO WATER?
SHE'S ONE OF THEM! AN *INHUMAN!*
THEY LED US INTO THIS!
WE DID.
RANDAC KNOWS, WE *DID.*

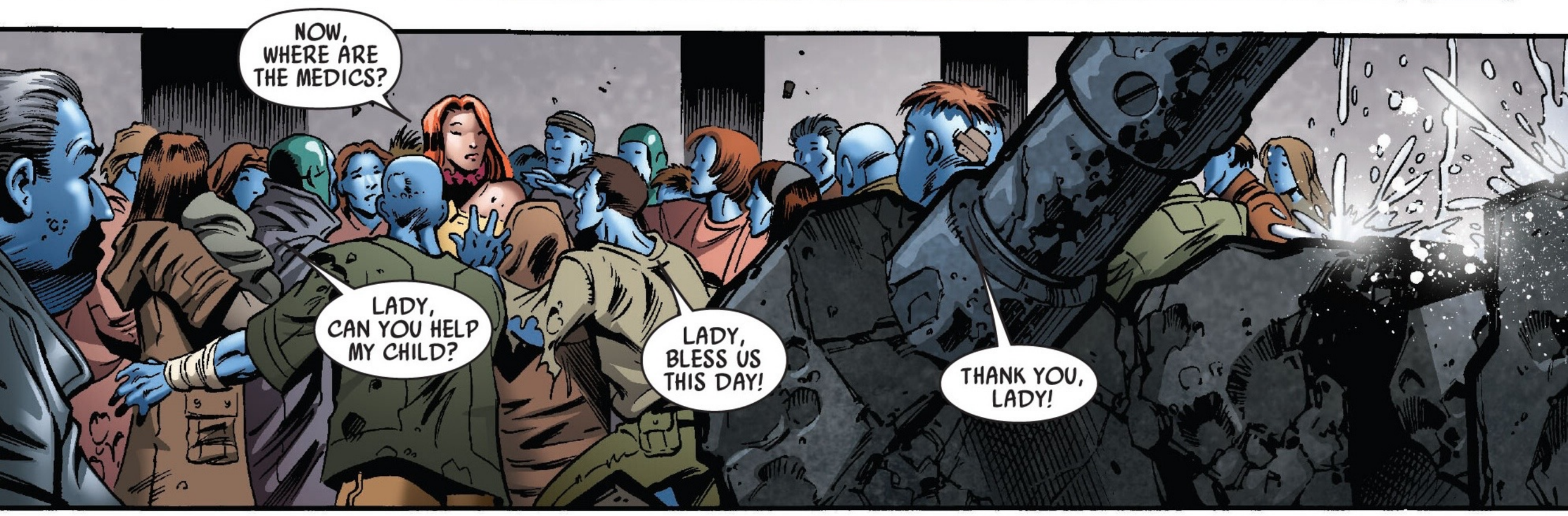


CLEAN WATER IS NEEDED IN THIS WARD.
AND OPEN SOME VENTS. I WANT TO BRING FRESH AIR TO THESE PEOPLE.


GET AN INTELFEED CAM ON HER.
QUICKLY.
Y-YES, LADY.

MY HUSBAND'S FAITH IN BLACK BOLT WAS VINDICATED YESTERDAY WHEN THE SHI'AR ATTACKED.
HOW, LADY?
THE SHI'AR CAN SEE WHAT THE INHUMANS AND THE KREE WILL ACHIEVE TOGETHER.

VULCAN IS SO PETRIFIED OF WHAT WE WILL BECOME, HE'S GONE TO WAR TO STOP US.
IMAGINE THAT. EVEN OUR HATED ENEMY BELIEVES WE WILL RISE TO BE UNSTOPPABLE.


NOW, WHERE ARE THE MEDICS?
LADY, CAN YOU HELP MY CHILD?
LADY, BLESS US THIS DAY!
THANK YOU, LADY!

THE CHAMBER OF DEVICES, ATTILAN.
I HEAR SHE EXCELLED HERSELF TODAY.
THE KREE PEOPLE HAVE WARMED TO HER, MAXIMUS. VIRAL FEED FROM THE INFIRMARY HAS SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE EMPIRE COMM-NET.
A CANNY MOVE ON HER PART. SHE MADE IT SEEM VERY NATURAL.
THAT'S JUST SIMPLE STATECRAFT. WE WERE ALL TRAINED IN IT.
THEY'RE ALREADY CALLING HER THE PEOPLE'S PRINCESS.
PAH!
HAS THE STARJAMMERS' REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE IN THEIR MISSION BEEN APPROVED, MY LORD?
WE HAVE AGREED TO IT.

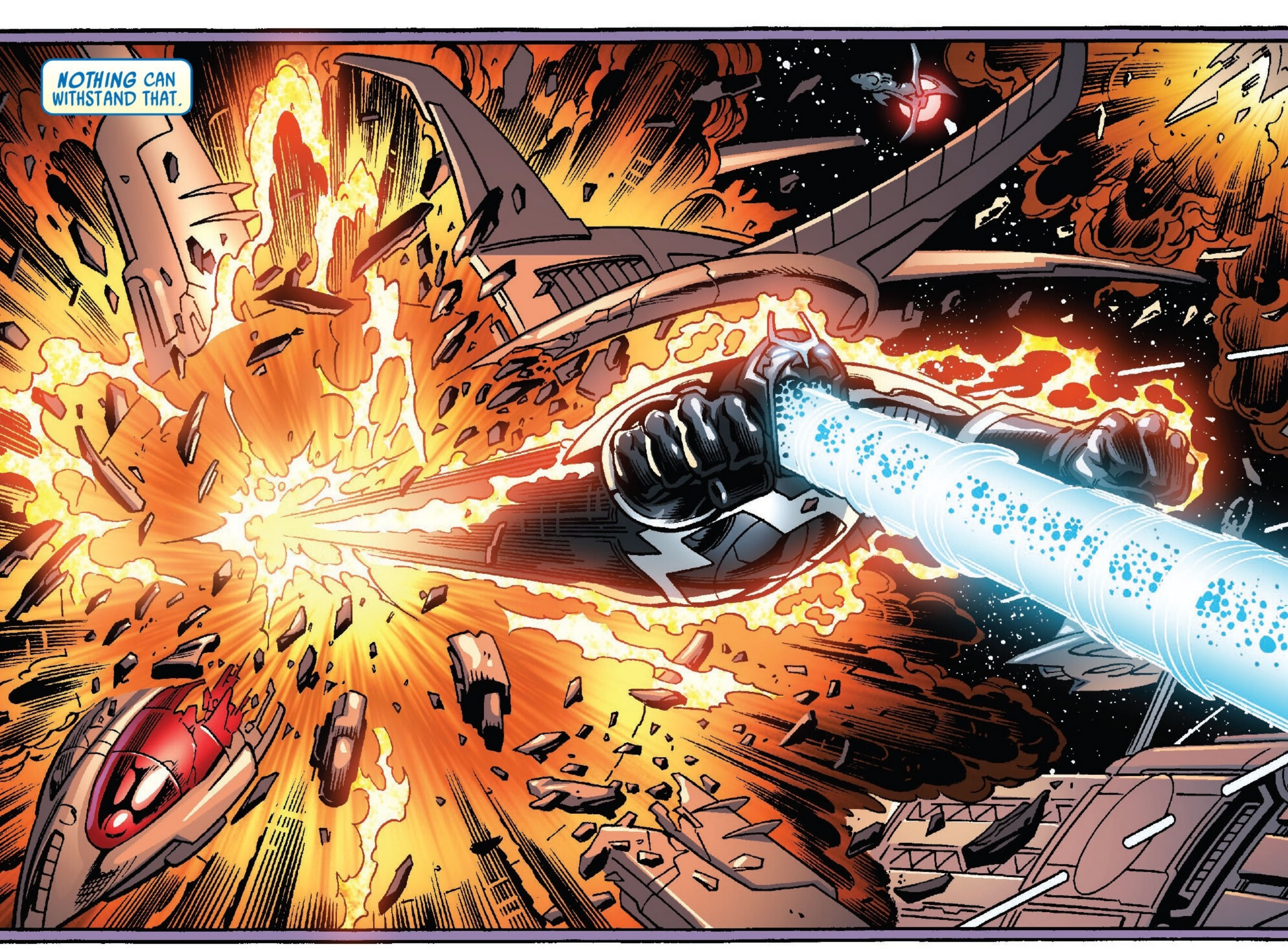
THEY'RE A LITTLE ROUGH AROUND THE EDGES BUT I BELIEVE THEY'LL SERVE.

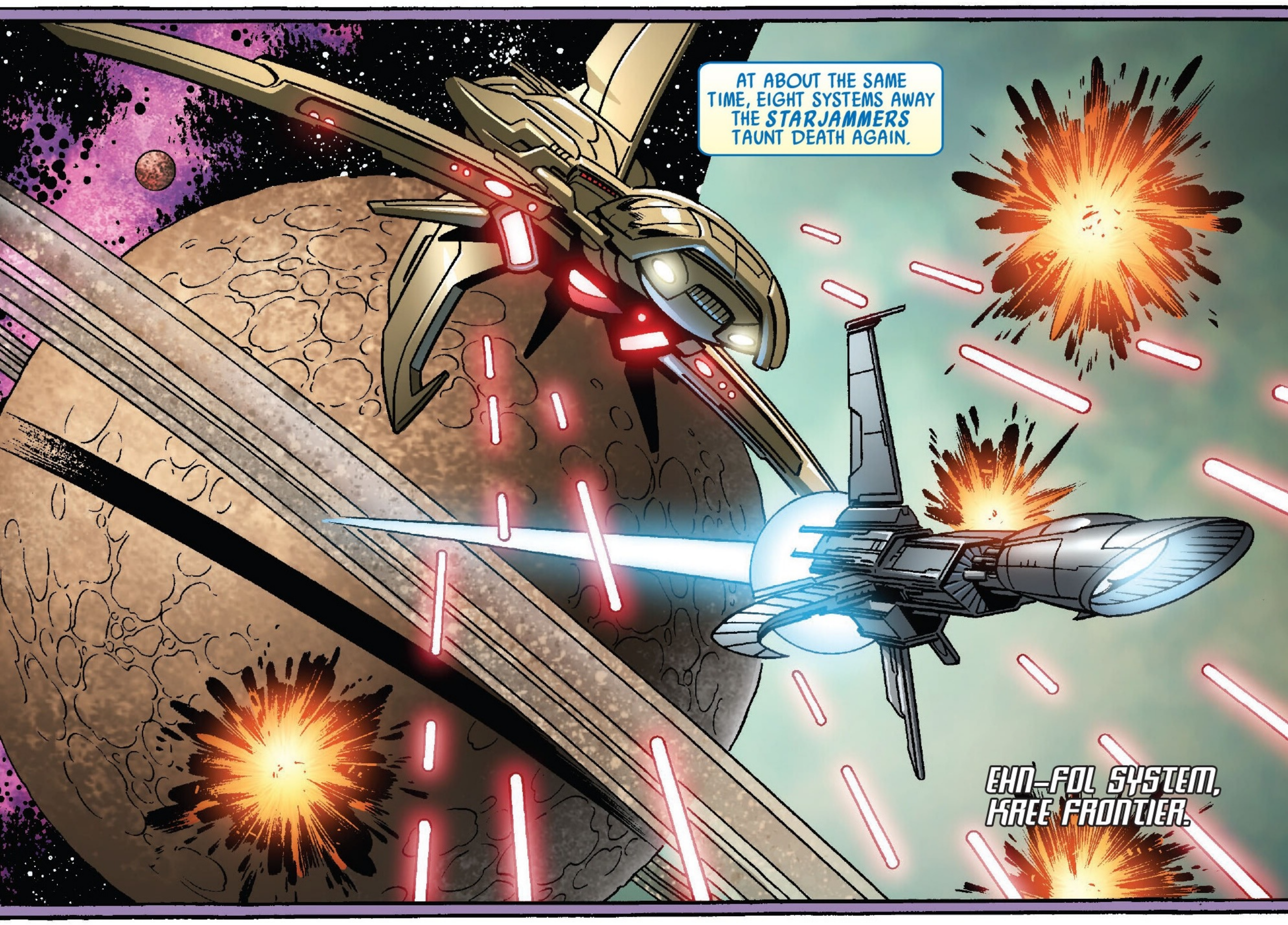
I THINK THIS BRUTE VULCAN WILL HEAR OUR REPLY LOUD AND CLEAR.

LORD MAXIMUS CALLS THEM CHORUS SENTRIES-- HE HAS INSTALLED ECHO-TECH WEAPON SYSTEMS INTO THEIR COMBAT CHASSIS.

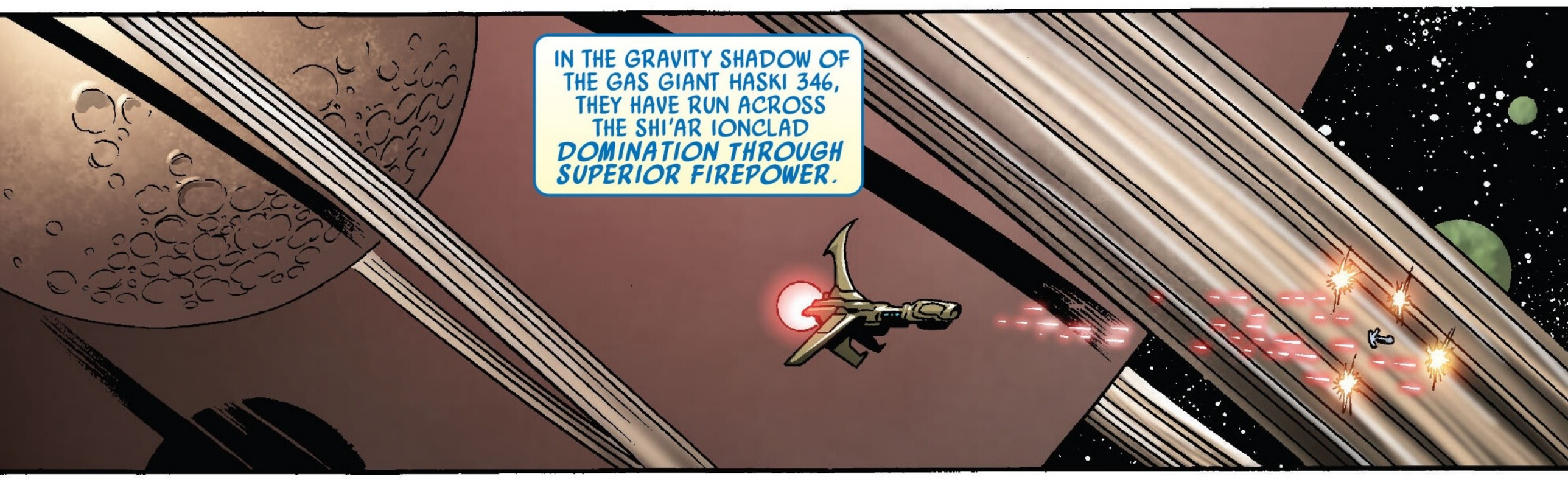
RADIUS SYSTEM, KREE FRONTIER.
BLACK BOLT'S BROTHER ENJOYS A POETIC FLOURISH. HE ONCE DEVISED AN INTERROGATION DEVICE THAT CHURNED BRAIN TISSUE INTO MUSH.
HE CALLED IT *THE SIEVE OF SECRETS.*
THE SHI'AR'S SECOND BATTLE GROUP IS JUST LEAVING ITS ANCHOR STATION ABOVE THE RUINS OF RADIUS EIGHTEEN WHEN OUR COUNTER-STRIKE REACHES THEM.
A HOT WAR EXCHANGE LASTS FOR ABOUT *TWO MINUTES.*

BY THEN, THE CHORUS SENTRIES, LAUNCHED LIKE MISSILES FROM OUR CARRIER SHIPS, ARE DEEP *INSIDE* THE SHI'AR FORMATION.
KKRUNCH
SHARRA AND KY'THRI!
AND THEY ARE *SINGING.*
THEIR BATTERIES CHARGED WITH ECHOES OF OUR *KING'S* VOICE.


NOTHING CAN WITHSTAND THAT.


AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME, EIGHT SYSTEMS AWAY THE STARJAMMERS TAUNT DEATH AGAIN.
EHN-FOL SYSTEM, KREE FRONTIER.

COME ABOUT! ONE-EIGHTY! AFT SHIELDS!
HRM. THEY'RE GETTING DAMN CLOSE, HAVOK.

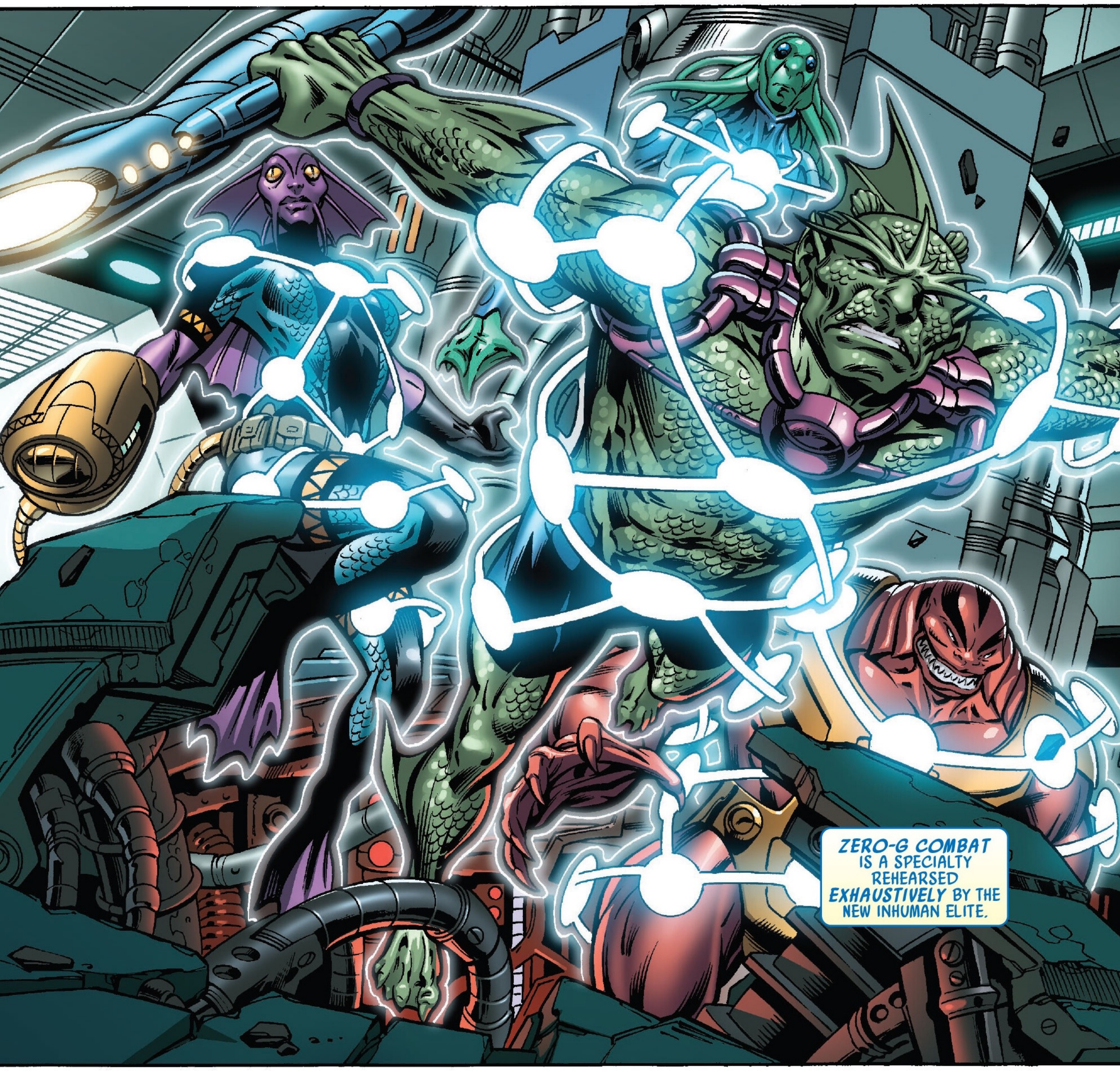

IN THE GRAVITY SHADOW OF THE GAS GIANT HASKI 346, THEY HAVE RUN ACROSS THE SHI'AR IONCLAD DOMINATION THROUGH SUPERIOR FIREPOWER.

SIGNAL CHANDILAR! TELL THEM WE'VE ENGAGED LILANDRA'S PIRATE ALLIES!

COME ON! COME ON! TIGHTER OR THEY'LL TORCH US WITH THEIR MAIN BATTERIES!
HAVOK IS THE LEADER OF THIS GROUP OF FREEBOOTERS. HIS OTHER NAME IS ALEX SUMMERS. HE IS A HUMAN MUTANT, PARTNER TO LORNA DANE, BROTHER TO CYCLOPS OF THE X-MEN AND--
--THIS ALWAYS MAKES ME CATCH MY BREATH-- BROTHER TO VULCAN.
HOW CAN ONE SIBLING BE SUCH A GOOD MAN AND THE OTHER AN AVATAR OF EVIL?

TAKING HITS, HAVOK!
HRM. CASCADE SHIELD FAILURE!
DAMN THIS VAT-GROWN GRAFT! I'D BE BETTER OFF WITH A HOOK!
KILL MAIN DRIVE! LORNA? NOW!
AS POLARIS, LORNA DANE IS A MUTANT ADEPT AT MAGNETISM. SHE SUMMONS HER GIFTS...
...AND THE STARJAMMER IS SUDDENLY RUSHING BACKWARDS UNDER THE IONCLAD'S METAL HULL, AND INSIDE THE MINIMUM TRAVERSE OF HER BATTERIES.
WE'VE LOST THEM! THEY'VE GONE UNDER US! THEY'RE STUCK TO OUR HULL LIKE A TICK!
MAGNETICS JUST WENT RIGHT OFF THE SCALE, SIR!
ACTIVATE ANTI-TELEPORT BAFFLES! I WON'T HAVE THEM USING ANY INHUMAN 'PORT TRICKS TO GET ABOARD!

BUT HAVOK, WAITING AT THE TOP HATCH, NEEDS NO INHUMAN TO GET INSIDE.
LET'S DO THIS.
HE UNLEASHES A STREAM OF CHARGED PLASMA THAT OPENS THE IONCLAD'S HULL AND *FRIES* THE GRAVITY GENERATORS.
HANDHOLDS! THE GRAVITY'S GONE OUT!
AND *THAT'S* THE MOMENT WHEN THE SHI'AR COMMANDER REALIZES TELEPORTERS WERE THE *LAST* THING HE SHOULD HAVE WORRIED ABOUT.


ZERO-G COMBAT IS A SPECIALTY REHEARSED EXHAUSTIVELY BY THE NEW INHUMAN ELITE.

THE DISCIPLINE HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY MASTERED BY THOSE WITH THE ATTRIBUTES TO PRACTICE FOR HOURS IN HIGH-PRESSURE WATER TANKS.
UGH!
AKKK GAH!

IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS, OUR TERRIGEN CHAMBERS HAVE PRODUCED AN UNUSUALLY HIGH NUMBER OF AQUATIC TRAITS.
NOW I UNDERSTAND WHY. AS EVER, THE SACRED GEMS WERE ANTICIPATING OUR NEEDS.
INTRUDER! INTRUDER!
GOOD DAY TO YOU, SHI'AR.
MY KING GREETS YOU WITH THESE WORDS.

DORHUN! CHECK THE HELM DESKS FOR AUTO-DESTRUCT SYSTEMS.

ALBAKOR! LOAD UP THE INTRUSION CODE LORD MAXIMUS WROTE FOR US.

HURRY! AS QUICK AS WE PLANNED!

YES, TRITON!

LOADING NOW. WE'RE IN.

ACCESSING SHI'AR NAVAL DATASPHERE...

YOU'VE ONLY GOT *NINETY* SECONDS BEFORE THEY DETECT YOU AND FREEZE YOU OUT.

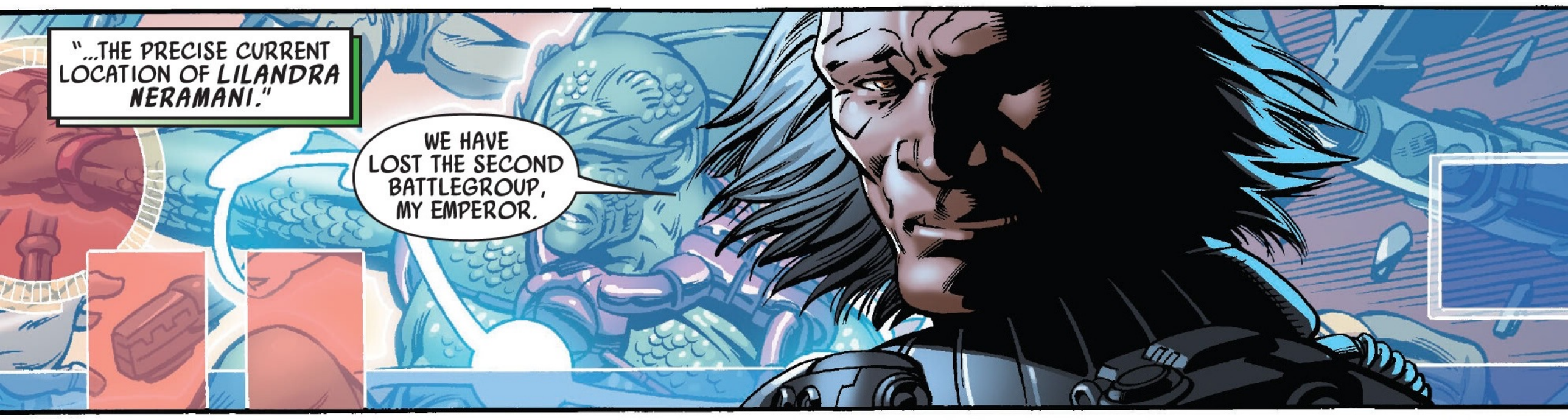
I KNOW, *I KNOW!*

GOT IT! IT'S HERE!

HAVOK?

READING YOU, TRITON.

WE'VE JUST PULLED THE INFORMATION OFF THE SHI'AR DATASPHERE...


"...THE PRECISE CURRENT LOCATION OF *LILANDRA NERAMANI*."
WE HAVE LOST THE SECOND BATTLEGROUP, MY EMPEROR.

FLAGSHIP OF THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM, HAMMER II.
SAY THAT *AGAIN*, ADMIRAL KA'ARDUM.
WE HAVE...AH...*LOST* THE SECOND BATTLEGROUP, MY LORD.

YOU DON'T *LOSE* A BATTLEGROUP, ADMIRAL.
IT'S NOT A *SET OF KEYS*. IT'S NOT A *PUPPY*. IT'S A SIXTY-FIVE-SHIP FLEET FORMATION WITH A FIVE POINT NINE *TRILLION* TON VOID DISPLACEMENT.
TRY AGAIN.

WHAT I *MEAN* TO SAY, MY EMPEROR...
WHAT I *MEAN* TO SAY IS THAT KREE-INHUMAN FORCES HAVE *OBLITERATED* THE SECOND BATTLEGROUP OFF RADIUS EIGHTEEN.
ENTIRELY OBLITERATED. NONE OF OUR SHIPS ESCAPED.

I'M GOING TO KILL THEM! I'M GOING TO KILL THEM ALL! ALL OF THE KREE! ALL OF THE INHUMANS!
I'M GOING TO KILL EVERY LAST ONE OF THEM!!!

PRAETOR! HOLD HER!
ALL THE ENEMIES SENT TO PLAGUE ME ARE GOING TO BE PUT TO DEATH...

...STARTING WITH HER!

WAR OF KINGS 3

MY LORD! MY LORD!
I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF EMPEROR VULCAN.
SO DO MY FELLOW WARRIORS THAT I, GLADIATOR, LEAD AS PRAETOR OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD. AND SO DO THE HIGH OFFICERS OF THE SHI'AR FLEET. MEN LIKE ADMIRAL KA'ARDUM.
AND SOMETIMES, WE NEED TO SAVE THE EMPEROR FROM HIMSELF.
THE HEAD THAT WEARS THE CROWN

YOU...

...DARE?

YOU WOULD DENY MY *IMPERIAL AUTHORITY*, TO SPARE *THIS* USURPING ☠☠☠☠?

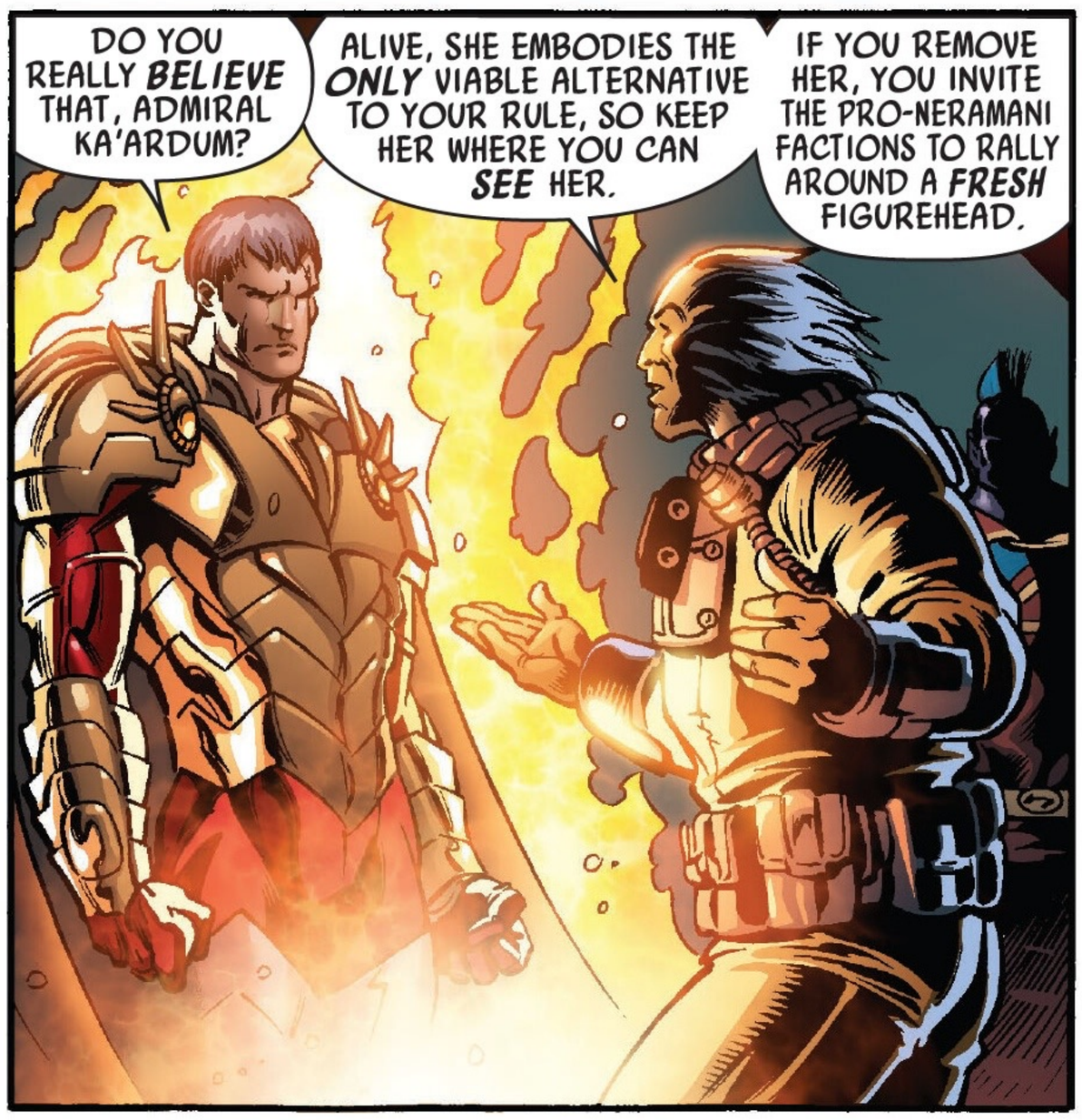
MY LORD, I--

I'LL HAVE YOU *FLAYED* FOR THIS! I'LL SPLIT YOU OPEN AND DROP YOU INTO A *BROOD* NEST! I'LL--

M-MAJESTOR... IF YOU KILL LILANDRA NERAMANI...YOU WILL MAKE HER A *MARTYR!*

STRIKE HER DOWN AND YOU WILL HAND YOUR OPPONENTS AN *UNDYING FIGURE* TO RALLY AROUND!

BUT WHILE SHE LIVES, THEY ARE BOUND BY HER SUCCESSION! *KILL* HER, AND THE *NEXT* PRETENDER TO THE THRONE COULD COME FROM *ANY* SHADOW!


DO YOU REALLY *BELIEVE* THAT, ADMIRAL KA'ARDUM?
ALIVE, SHE EMBODIES THE *ONLY* VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO YOUR RULE, SO KEEP HER WHERE YOU CAN *SEE* HER.
IF YOU REMOVE HER, YOU INVITE THE PRO-NERAMANI FACTIONS TO RALLY AROUND A *FRESH* FIGUREHEAD.

WHAT DO *YOU* THINK, GLADIATOR?

I--
MY LORD, WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, I BELIEVE THE ADMIRAL MAKES A VALID POINT.

WELL THEN, I *THANK* HIM FOR IT.
THAT WAS A TERRIBLE RISK YOU TOOK, KA'ARDUM.
I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF THE EMPEROR.
SHE SHOULD LIVE. YOU'RE *RIGHT*, SHE *SHOULD* LIVE.
SHE MUST BE TAKEN BACK TO CHANDILAR IN CHAINS AND DISGRACE, TO STAND A *PUBLIC TRAIL*.

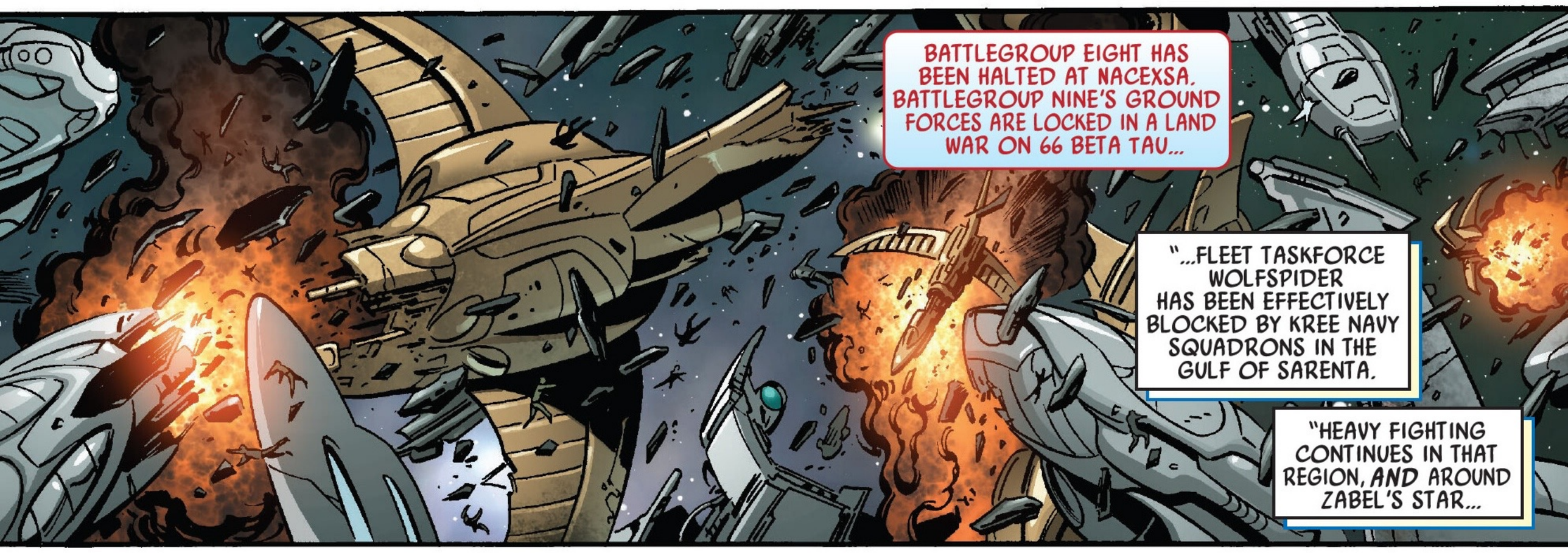
IT WILL RESULT IN *EXECUTION*, OF COURSE, BUT DUE PROCESS WILL HAVE BEEN *SEEN* TO BE DONE, AND THE PEOPLE WILL HAVE *NO DOUBT* OF HER CRIMES.
SHE'LL BE NO *MARTYR* THEN.

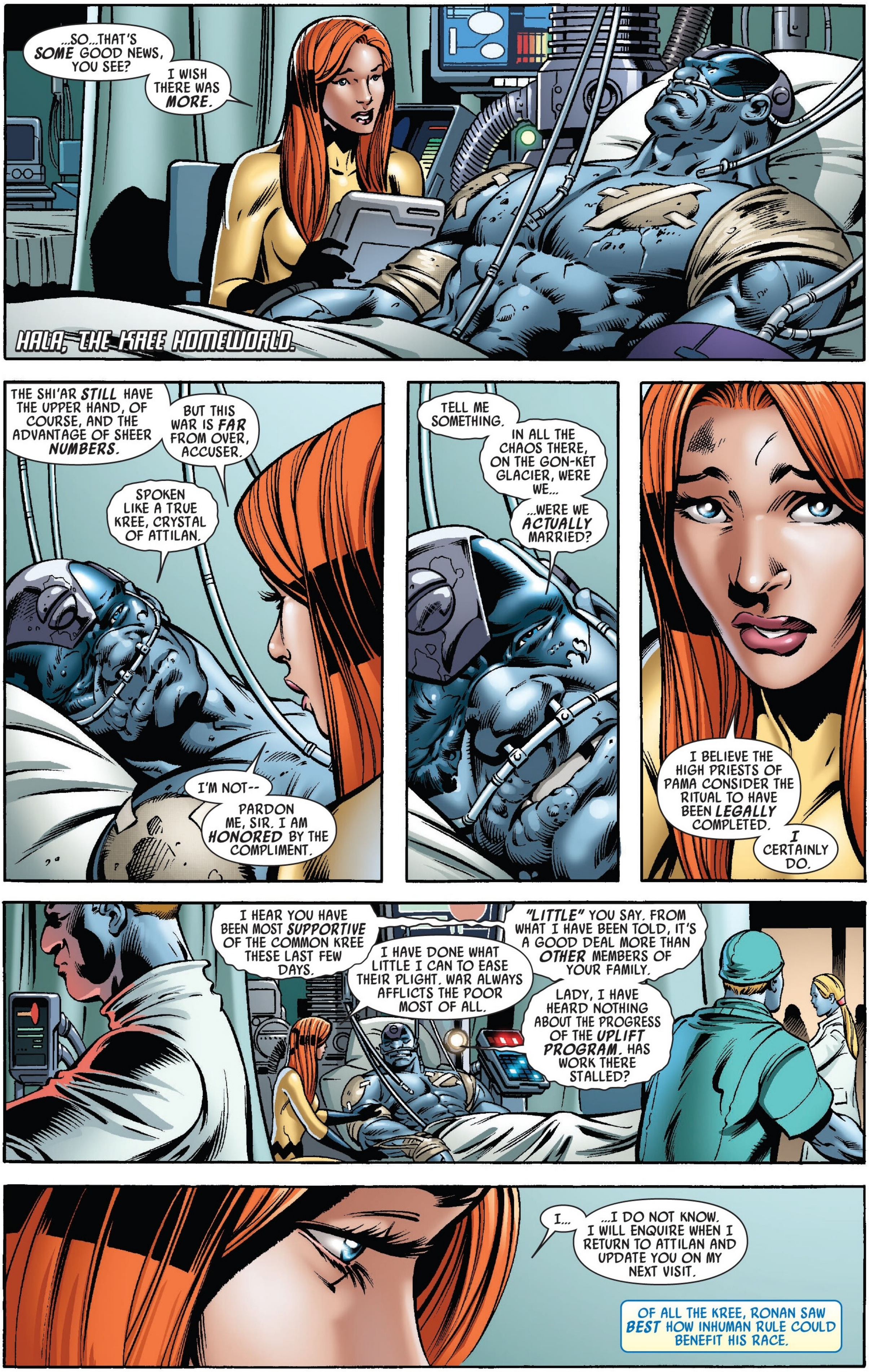
I WANT YOU TO CONDUCT HER BACK TO THE THRONEWORLD, GLADIATOR.
AS SOON AS THE FIGHTING HERE AND IN THE GULF OF SARENTA IS CONTAINED, YOU WILL SEE TO THIS *PERSONALLY*.
I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF EMPEROR VULCAN.
ADMIRAL! GATHER YOUR SENIOR OFFICERS! WE'LL REVIEW THE MOST RECENT BATTLEFIELD INTELFEEDS TOGETHER!
AT ONCE, LORD VULCAN.
THE COMBINED EFFECTS OF THE FLEET BATTLEGROUPS AND THE IMPERIAL GUARD MADE TYPICALLY *IMPRESSIVE* HEADWAY IN THE FIRST TWO DAYS OF THIS CONFLICT.

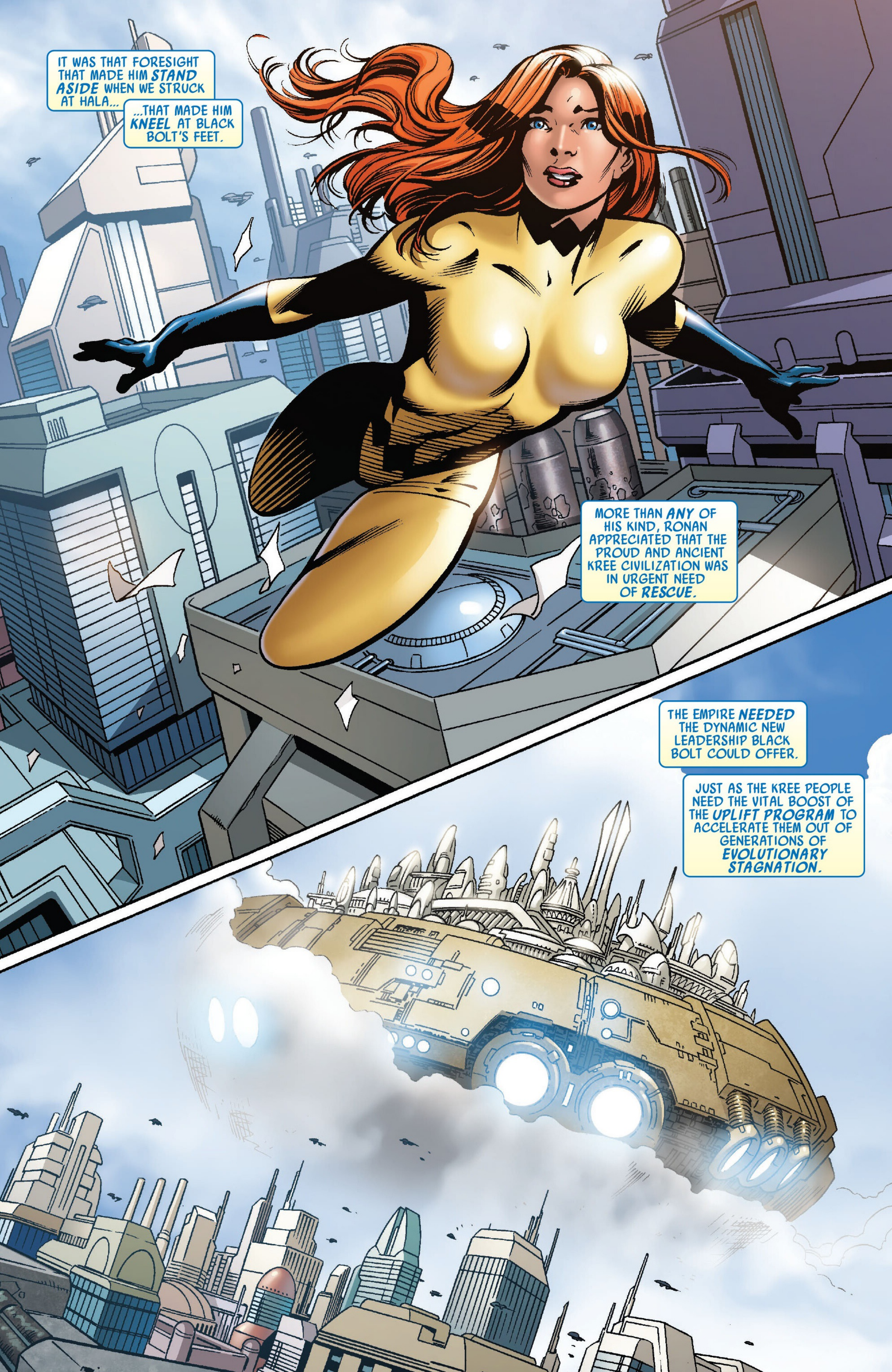
BUT MOMENTUM IS ALREADY SLOWING, FASTER THAN I PREDICTED.
EMPEROR VULCAN IS TOO IMPETUOUS AND CAVALIER IN HIS TACTICS. HE PRESSES URGENTLY AND OVER-EXTENDS.
HE IS HEAVY-HANDED.

AND THE INHUMANS ARE PROVING TO BE EVERY BIT THE MILITARY ELITE THE WHISPERS SUGGESTED.

THE KREE ARE FIGHTING WITH A GREATER STRATEGIC TENACITY THAN IN ANY CONFLICT I'VE SEEN IN THE LAST SIXTEEN DECADES.
INHUMAN LEADERSHIP IS STRONG, INSPIRATIONAL, AND VERY FOCUSED. WE HAVE LOST THE SECOND BATTLEGROUP AT RADIUS EIGHTEEN.


BATTLEGROUP EIGHT HAS BEEN HALTED AT NACEXSA. BATTLEGROUP NINE'S GROUND FORCES ARE LOCKED IN A LAND WAR ON 66 BETA TAU...
"...FLEET TASKFORCE WOLFSPIDER HAS BEEN EFFECTIVELY BLOCKED BY KREE NAVY SQUADRONS IN THE GULF OF SARENTA.
"HEAVY FIGHTING CONTINUES IN THAT REGION, AND AROUND ZABEL'S STAR...


...SO...THAT'S SOME GOOD NEWS, YOU SEE?
I WISH THERE WAS MORE.
HALA, THE KREE HOMEWORLD.
THE SHI'AR STILL HAVE THE UPPER HAND, OF COURSE, AND THE ADVANTAGE OF SHEER NUMBERS.
BUT THIS WAR IS FAR FROM OVER, ACCUSER.
SPOKEN LIKE A TRUE KREE, CRYSTAL OF ATTILAN.
I'M NOT--
PARDON ME, SIR. I AM HONORED BY THE COMPLIMENT.
TELL ME SOMETHING.
IN ALL THE CHAOS THERE, ON THE GON-KET GLACIER, WERE WE...
...WERE WE ACTUALLY MARRIED?
I BELIEVE THE HIGH PRIESTS OF PAMA CONSIDER THE RITUAL TO HAVE BEEN LEGALLY COMPLETED.
I CERTAINLY DO.
I HEAR YOU HAVE BEEN MOST SUPPORTIVE OF THE COMMON KREE THESE LAST FEW DAYS.
I HAVE DONE WHAT LITTLE I CAN TO EASE THEIR PLIGHT. WAR ALWAYS AFFLICTS THE POOR MOST OF ALL.
"LITTLE" YOU SAY. FROM WHAT I HAVE BEEN TOLD, IT'S A GOOD DEAL MORE THAN OTHER MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY.
LADY, I HAVE HEARD NOTHING ABOUT THE PROGRESS OF THE UPLIFT PROGRAM. HAS WORK THERE STALLED?
I...
...I DO NOT KNOW. I WILL ENQUIRE WHEN I RETURN TO ATTILAN AND UPDATE YOU ON MY NEXT VISIT.
OF ALL THE KREE, RONAN SAW BEST HOW INHUMAN RULE COULD BENEFIT HIS RACE.


IT WAS THAT FORESIGHT THAT MADE HIM STAND ASIDE WHEN WE STRUCK AT HALA...
...THAT MADE HIM KNEEL AT BLACK BOLT'S FEET.
MORE THAN ANY OF HIS KIND, RONAN APPRECIATED THAT THE PROUD AND ANCIENT KREE CIVILIZATION WAS IN URGENT NEED OF RESCUE.
THE EMPIRE NEEDED THE DYNAMIC NEW LEADERSHIP BLACK BOLT COULD OFFER.
JUST AS THE KREE PEOPLE NEED THE VITAL BOOST OF THE UPLIFT PROGRAM TO ACCELERATE THEM OUT OF GENERATIONS OF EVOLUTIONARY STAGNATION.

I REMEMBER RONAN'S DELIGHT, WHEN IT WAS EXPLAINED TO HIM ON THE VERY FIRST DAY OF BLACK BOLT'S RULE...
AN UPLIFT PROGRAM?
MY HUSBAND HAS DEVISED IT, AND HIS BROTHER MAXIMUS IS DEVELOPING THE MECHANISMS TO MAKE IT WORK.
WE PROPOSE TO USE THE TERRIGEN MISTS TO RAPIDLY EVOLVE THE KREE SPECIES.
YOUR PEOPLE ARE CAUGHT IN A DEAD END, ACCUSER. THIS PROGRAM WILL AFFORD MANY A--
LORD KARNAK, YOU DON'T HAVE TO SELL IT TO ME.
FORGET ANNIHILUS, OR THE PHALANX, OR THE DAS'T SKRULLS! EVOLUTIONARY STANDSTILL HAS BEEN THE KREE'S REAL ENEMY FOR TOO LONG!
I APPLAUD THIS PROGRAM! I EMBRACE IT!
THIS PLEASES US GREATLY, ACCUSER.
LADY MEDUSA, MY QUEEN.
I WELCOMED YOUR HUSBAND TO THE KREE THRONE FOR PRECISELY THIS REASON. I KNEW THAT THE INHUMANS' RULE WOULD BRING THE KREE A NEW LEASE ON LIFE.
IT IS WHY I HAVE PLACED MY TRUST IN ATTILAN ENTIRELY.

OH, GREAT RANDAC! IF WHAT I SUSPECT IS TRUE, HOW AM I *EVER* GOING TO TELL HIM?

MAXIMUS, I NEED TO ASK YOU ABOUT THE UPLIFT PR--

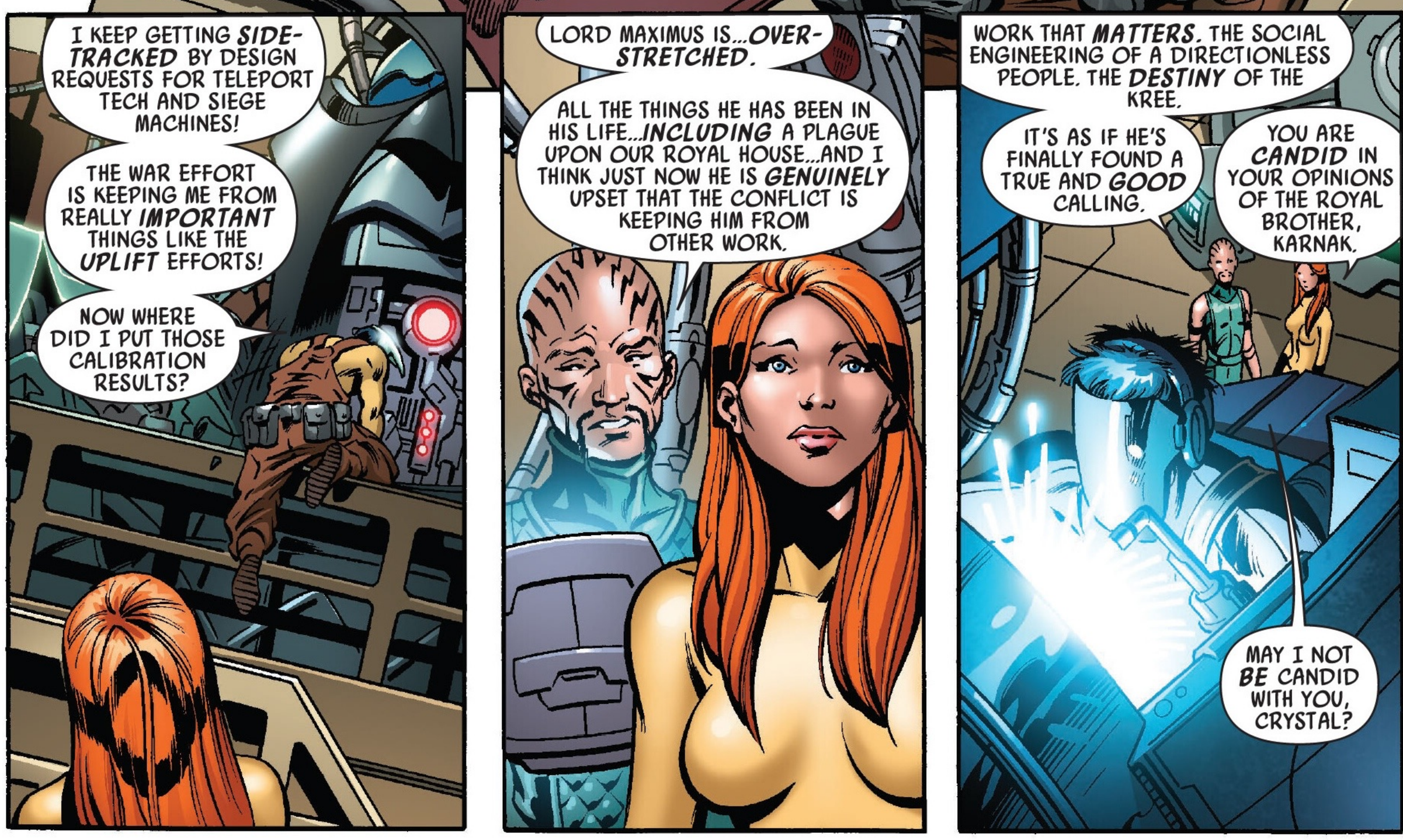
DON'T! *DON'T!* I'M BEHIND WITH *EVERYTHING!*

SET-BACK AFTER SET-BACK AFTER *SET-BACK!*

IT'S THIS *WAR*. IT'S THIS *DAMN* WAR!

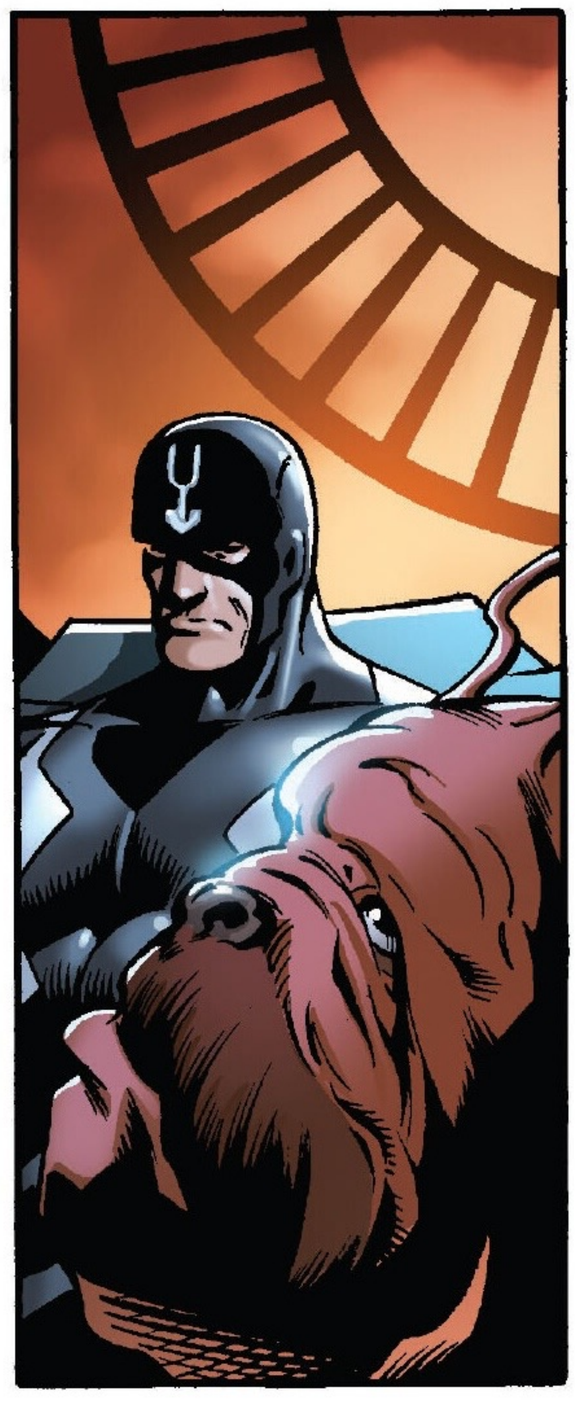
THE ROYAL CITY OF ATTILAN.

THE CHAMBER OF DEVICES.



WE WILL CARE FOR THEM AND RULE OVER THEM.
REALLY? AND WHAT WILL THAT MAKE THEM, MEDUSA? SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS?
A SLAVE-CASTE LIKE THE ALPHA PRMITIVES, WHO TOIL IN OUR CATACOMBS?
WE CAN ONLY DO SO MUCH. IF THE KREE GENOME IS RESISTANT TO TERRIGEN MUTAGENESIS, THEN--
THE KREE ARE EXPECTING A GREAT DEAL OF US. THEY ARE A PROUD PEOPLE.
SO ARE WE, SISTER.
WE MUST FOCUS ON OUR OWN NEEDS. WHAT IS GOOD FOR THE INHUMANS WILL, BY EXTENSION, BE GOOD FOR THE KREE.
WE'VE TAKEN THEM INTO A WAR AGAINST THE GREATEST POWER IN CREATION. HOW IS THAT GOOD FOR THEM?
THEN WHAT? ANOTHER WAR? AND ANOTHER?
THERE WILL ALWAYS BE SOMEONE TO OPPOSE US! THERE WILL ALWAYS BE SOMEONE TO FIGHT!
WE WILL BEAT THEM ALL.
AND IF WE CAN'T BEAT THEM, WE'LL JOIN THEM. OR CHANGE THEM.
I WILL HUSH MY MOUTH!
MAXIMUS!
WHAT DOES LORD MAXIMUS MEAN?
NOTHING. HE IS DISTRACTED.
BLACK BOLT IS READY FOR YOUR DAILY REPORT, SISTER.

ATTILAN THRONE ROOM.



SHI'AR WARBIRD "SPIRIT OF THE AERIE."
REFUELING OFF CYTHANI 93, SHI'AR OUTWORLDS.
HOW'S THE PRISONER, PRAETOR?
QUIET.
SHNK

REFUELING WILL BE COMPLETE IN EIGHT MINUTES. THEN WE'LL BE UNDERWAY TO CHANDILAR.
NOTED.
I WANTED TO EXPRESS MY *APPRECIATION*, PRAETOR.

FOR WHAT?
UH...I-I KNOW THERE WERE *SEVERAL* CANDIDATES EAGER TO BECOME THE NEW SMASHER.
I'M GRATEFUL FOR THE FAITH YOU HAVE SHOWN IN RECOMMENDING *ME*.
I WILL *NOT* FAIL YOU.

NO, YOU *WON'T*.
IT'S FAILING THE *MAJESTOR* YOU SHOULD WORRY ABOUT.
I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF EMPEROR VULCAN.
I'M SURE YOU DO.
BRIDGE TO ALL STATIONS!

BRIDGE TO ALL STATIONS! ENEMY CONTACT, CLOSING FAST!
I SAY AGAIN, CLOSING *FAST!*
RED ALERT!

INTRUDERS ABOARD! INTRUDERS ABOARD!
KORVUS, TAKE OUT THAT FLANK!
ALEX... GLADIATOR AT TWELVE O'CLOCK!
I SEE HIM, LORNA.
NHH--
STARJAMMERS.
THIS EFFORT IS FUTILE.
WE BROUGHT A LITTLE MUSCLE WITH US THIS TIME.
THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY.
THE-- WHO?

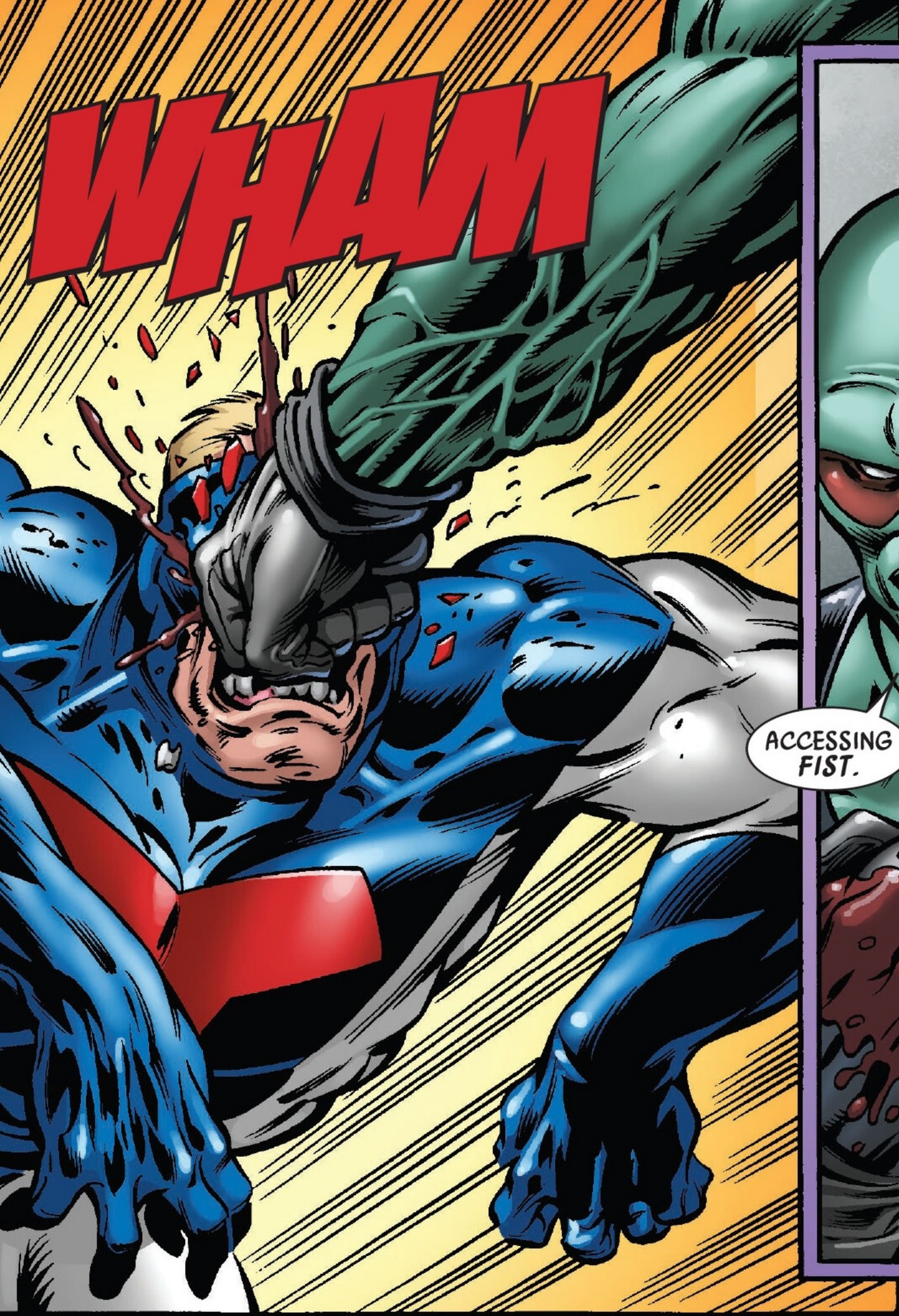
SAY HELLO TO MY LITTLE FRIEND.

AGGGHH! GNNAAAAH!

NEVER DOUBT A RACCOON.

THE PRAETOR'S DOWN! IMPERIAL GUARD, MOVE!
REPEL INSURGENTS!
COME AT ELECTRON WITH A METAL SWORD, TRAITOR?
ARE THE LAWS OF MAGNETISM A MYSTERY TO YOU?
UGHHN!
A-ACTUALLY, ELECTRON, YOU'RE WHY WE BROUGHT A BIG STICK!
I AM GROOT!
KRA-DOOM

AGH! PHASING THROUGH ME!
DON'T STRUGGLE! I'LL MAKE IT QUI--
AAAAAAHH! INSIDE YOU! INSIDE YOUR SUIT! SO COLD! SO OLD!
YEAH?
MAYBE THAT'LL TEACH YOU TO KEEP YOUR HANDS TO YOURSELF.
KTANG
ACCESSING HYPER-STRENGTH UPLOAD FROM MY EXOSPECS.


WHAM

ACCESSING FIST.

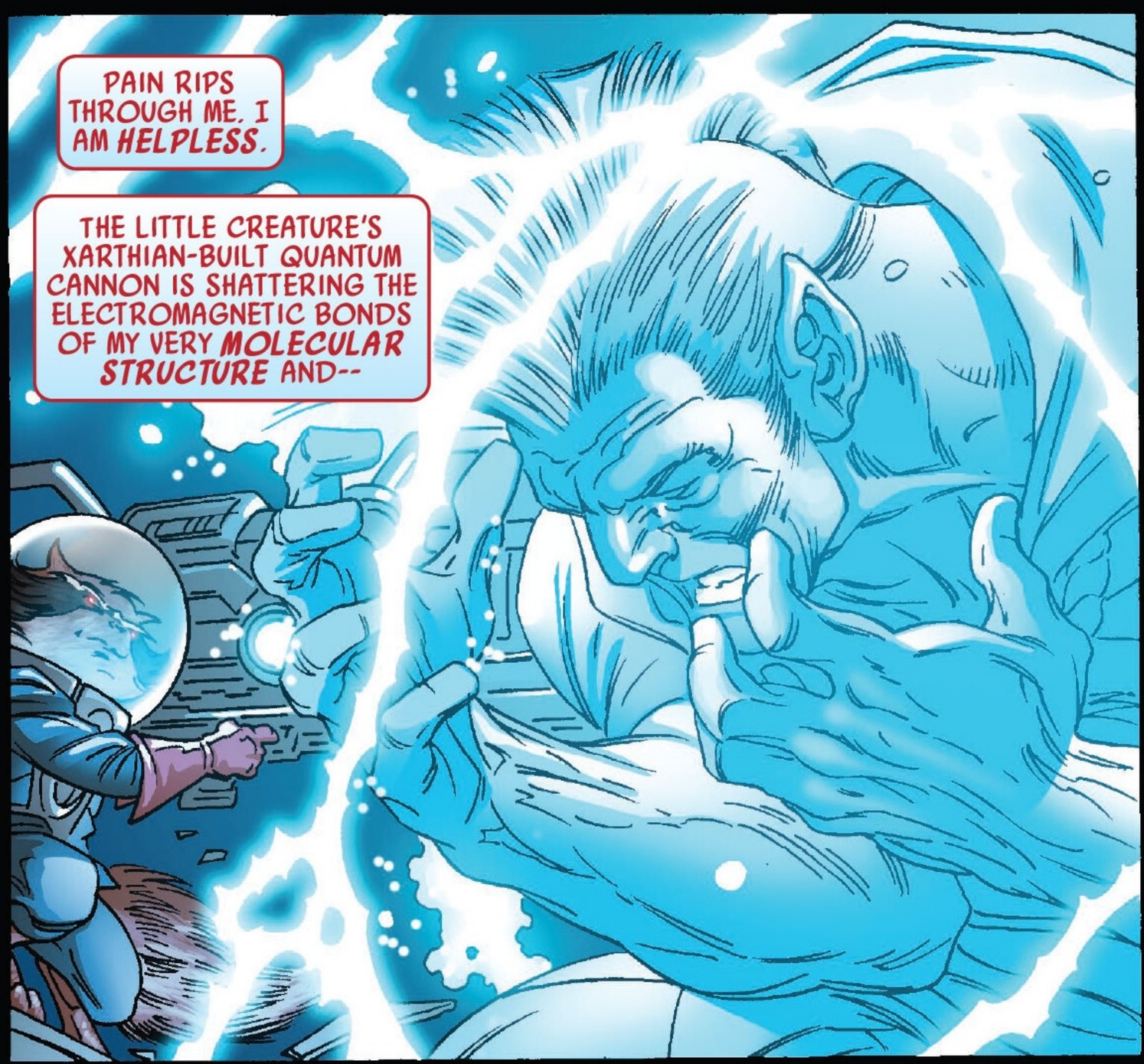
UGH!
AGHH!
GPUHH!
WHAM
WHUD
WHACK

MAJOR VICTORY, DOES THE RACCOON NEED HELP?

I GOT THE BIG GUY COLD, DRAX, BUT LET'S SHAKE IT FOR ********** SAKE! WE'RE OUTSTAYING OUR WELCOME!
HAVOK! TIME TO SNATCH WHAT WE CAME FOR!

GET THE DOOR, LORNA.
OFF ITS HINGES, ALEX.
SHHHRAAANKK

HEY, LILANDRA. YOUR CHARIOT AWAITS.
HAVOK! THANK THE STARS!


PAIN RIPS THROUGH ME. I AM HELPLESS.
THE LITTLE CREATURE'S XARTHIAN-BUILT QUANTUM CANNON IS SHATTERING THE ELECTROMAGNETIC BONDS OF MY VERY MOLECULAR STRUCTURE AND--

WAIT. XARTH HAS NO TRADITION OF QUANTUM WEAPONS. THIS IS--
A TRICK. A TELEPATHIC ASSAULT CAUSING ME TO QUESTION MY PSIONIC-FUELED POWERS.

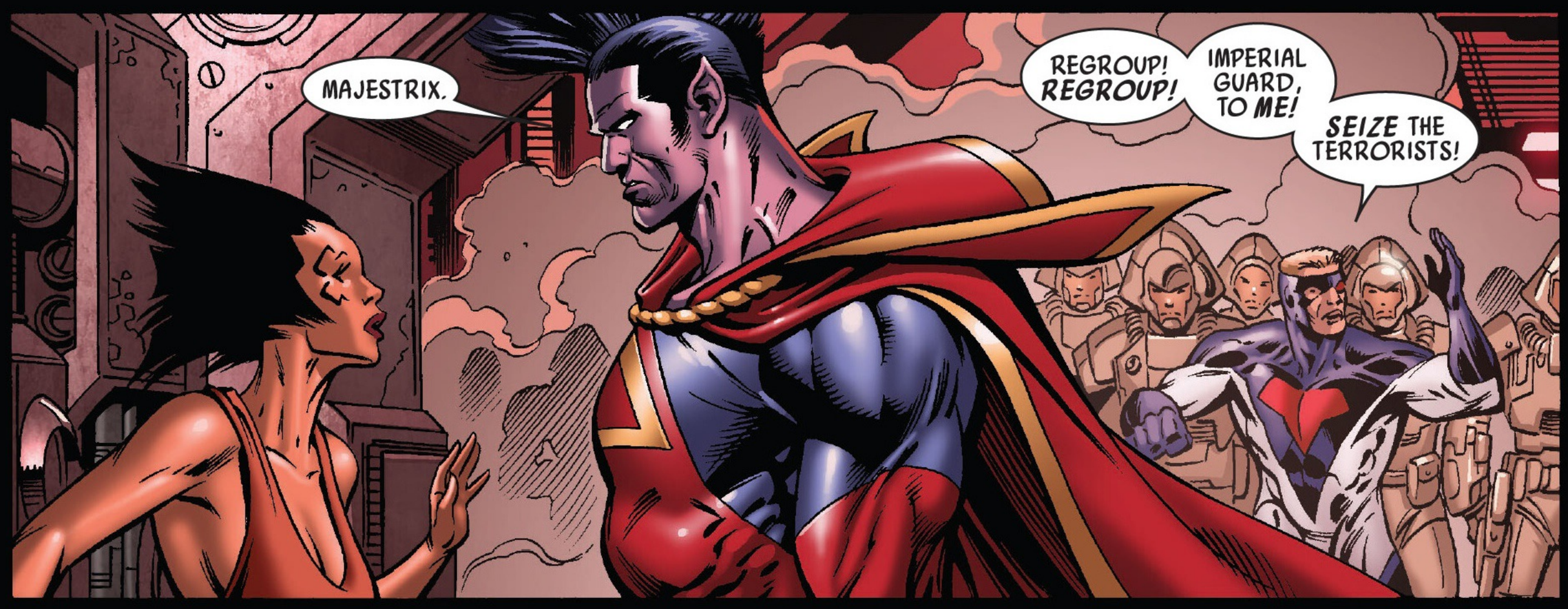
GET OUT OF MY MIND!
ROCKET! MY ILLUSION IS SLIPPING! I CAN'T HOLD IT ANY LONGER!
AWWWW, NUTS. IT WAS SWEET WHILE IT LASTED, RACHEL BABY.
UM. HI. GLADIATOR, ISN'T IT?
NOW LET'S NOT DO ANYTHING HASTY, OKAY?
I MEAN, YOU WOULDN'T HURT A CUTE LITTLE MAMMAL WITH FUR THIS SOFT, WOULD YOU?
FEEL.
LILANDRA...
OH MY GOD! HE'LL KILL THEM!
I AM--
AKKKG!
UGHHNN!

NHH!
SK-TANG

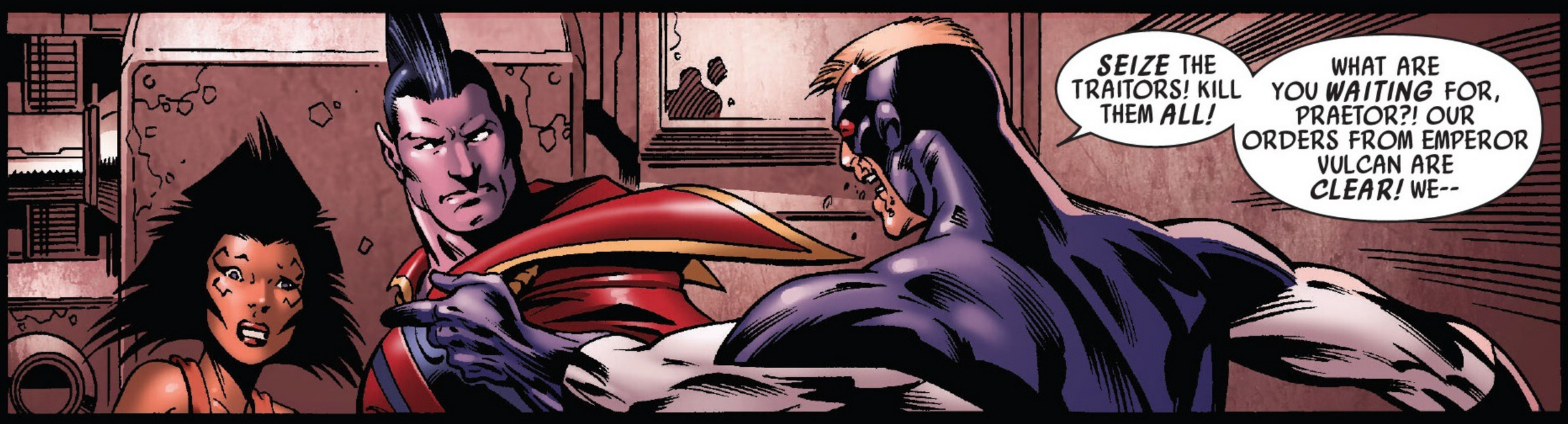
PLEASE, KALLARK--

UGHN!

GUUHHH!


MAJESTRIX.
REGROUP! REGROUP!
IMPERIAL GUARD, TO ME!
SEIZE THE TERRORISTS!

OH, KALLARK. DID KA'ARDUM SAVE MY LIFE FOR THIS?
I--
YOU ARE THE MOST DEVOTED AND LOYAL MAN I'VE EVER KNOWN, KAL.
BUT WHO ARE YOU LOYAL TO?
IF IT IS TO VULCAN, THEN KNOW HE WILL ASSUREDLY DOOM THE SHI'AR.


SEIZE THE TRAITORS! KILL THEM ALL!
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR, PRAETOR?! OUR ORDERS FROM EMPEROR VULCAN ARE CLEAR! WE--

EUUKKKTP--

I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF EMPRESS LILANDRA.

WAR OF KINGS 4

SURELY YOU'RE EXAGGERATING, ADMIRAL KA'ARDUM. THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM? OVERSTRETCHED?
NOT YET, EMPEROR VULCAN. NOT TODAY. BUT AT THIS RATE, WITHIN A FEW MONTHS, A YEAR AT MOST.
MY L-LORD... UHM...YOU SHOULD PROBABLY REMOVE YOURSELF FROM THIS LOCA--
QUIET! ADULTS ARE TALKING.
THE IMPERIUM IS PRESENTLY ENGAGED IN NINETY-SEVEN SEPARATE CAMPAIGNS OF PACIFICATION OR ANNEXATION.
WE HAVE ALREADY BEEN OBLIGED TO DOWN-SCALE SIXTEEN OF THEM IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THE SUPPLY OF MEN AND MUNITIONS TO THE KREE WARFRONTS.
SO INCREASE PRODUCTION IN THE SHIPYARDS AND ARSENALS! IT'S NOT COMPLICATED! FOR GOD'S SAKE, DOESN'T ANYBODY OWN A WHIP ANYMORE?
MY L-LORD, YOU REALLY SHOULD B--
HUSH!
THERE ARE REPORTS OF UNREST IN THE LABOR POOLS OF MOST MANUFACTURING WORLDS, MAJESTOR.
FURTHERMORE, SEVERAL OUTWORLDS HAVE NOW RISEN IN REVOLT AT THE SCALE OF THE TAXES WE ARE DEMANDING OF THEM.
THE SHEER INTENSITY OF THIS WAR WITH THE KREE IS EXHAUSTING OUR MILITARY RESOURCES, MY EMPEROR.
IT IS BEGINNING TO SAP THE SPIRIT OF THE SHI'AR.
DO YOU CONCUR WITH THE ADMIRAL'S ASSESSMENT, CHANCELLOR ARAKI?
--TZZBBBZ--
TZZBZBZKK--
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE INTELFEED?
COMMUNICATIONS HAVE BEEN IMPAIRED BY THE AFTEREFFECTS OF NEGA-BOMBING.
I URGE YOU TO RETURN TO THE FLAGSHIP, MY LORD!

WHAT? AND MISS THIS BRACING WALK IN THE COUNTRY?
SKI'AR GROUND ASSAULT OF THE KREE HEARTWORLD KON-SHOR.
PERHAPS WE SHOULD NEGOTIATE A CEASE-FIRE WITH THE KREE.
THAT SOUNDS AN AWFUL LOT LIKE TREASON, ADMIRAL, I--
SHARRA AND KY'THRI!
A SENTRY! A SENTRY HAS GOT THROUGH THE DEFENSE BARRAGE!
KREESH
IT'S BREACHED THE SHIELDS! IT'S--
AAAIEEEE--
IMPERIAL GUARD! PROTECT THE MAJESTOR!

MUST I DO EVERYTHING MYSE--
FTOOMFF
THE SHI'AR MAJESTOR IS UNDER MY PROTECTION.
INDEED.
AND WHO MIGHT YOU BE?

THE SHORES OF THE SARETH OCEAN, HALA.

--AND SO I THOUGHT THE SEA AIR MIGHT AID YOUR CONVALESCENCE.

YOU'VE BEEN STARING AT THE SAME HOSPITAL WALLS FOR *TOO LONG*. A CHANGE OF SCENERY WILL IMPROVE YOUR CONSTITUTION, ACCUSER.

BESIDES, IT'S THE *LEAST* A WIFE CAN DO FOR HER HUSBAND.

WIFE. *HMH...*

I CONFESS I AM STILL COMING TO *GRIPS* WITH THAT CONCEPT.

YOU KNOW, LADY CRYSTAL, BY RIGHTS, THE SHI'AR SHOULD HAVE *CRUSHED* US ALREADY. THEIR IMPERIUM HAS *NEVER* BEEN SO STRONG, NOR OUR EMPIRE SO *WEAK*.

IT IS A TESTAMENT TO THE LEADERSHIP OF ATTILAN AND THE POWER OF THE *NEW INHUMAN ELITE* THAT WE ARE HOLDING OUR OWN.

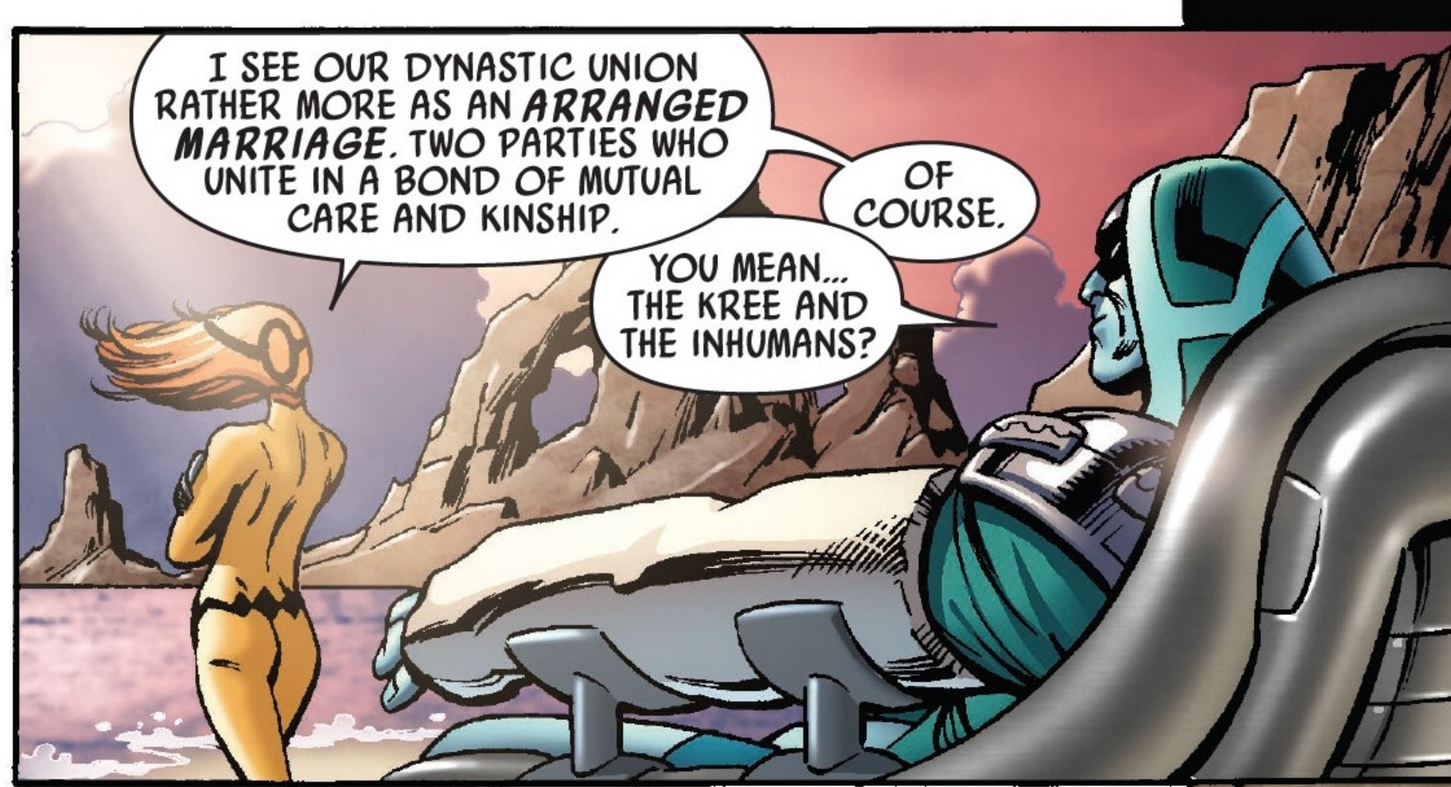
IT'S MORE THAN THAT. MY COUSIN KARNAK TELLS ME THE SHI'AR ARE IN DANGER OF *OVER-STRETCH*.

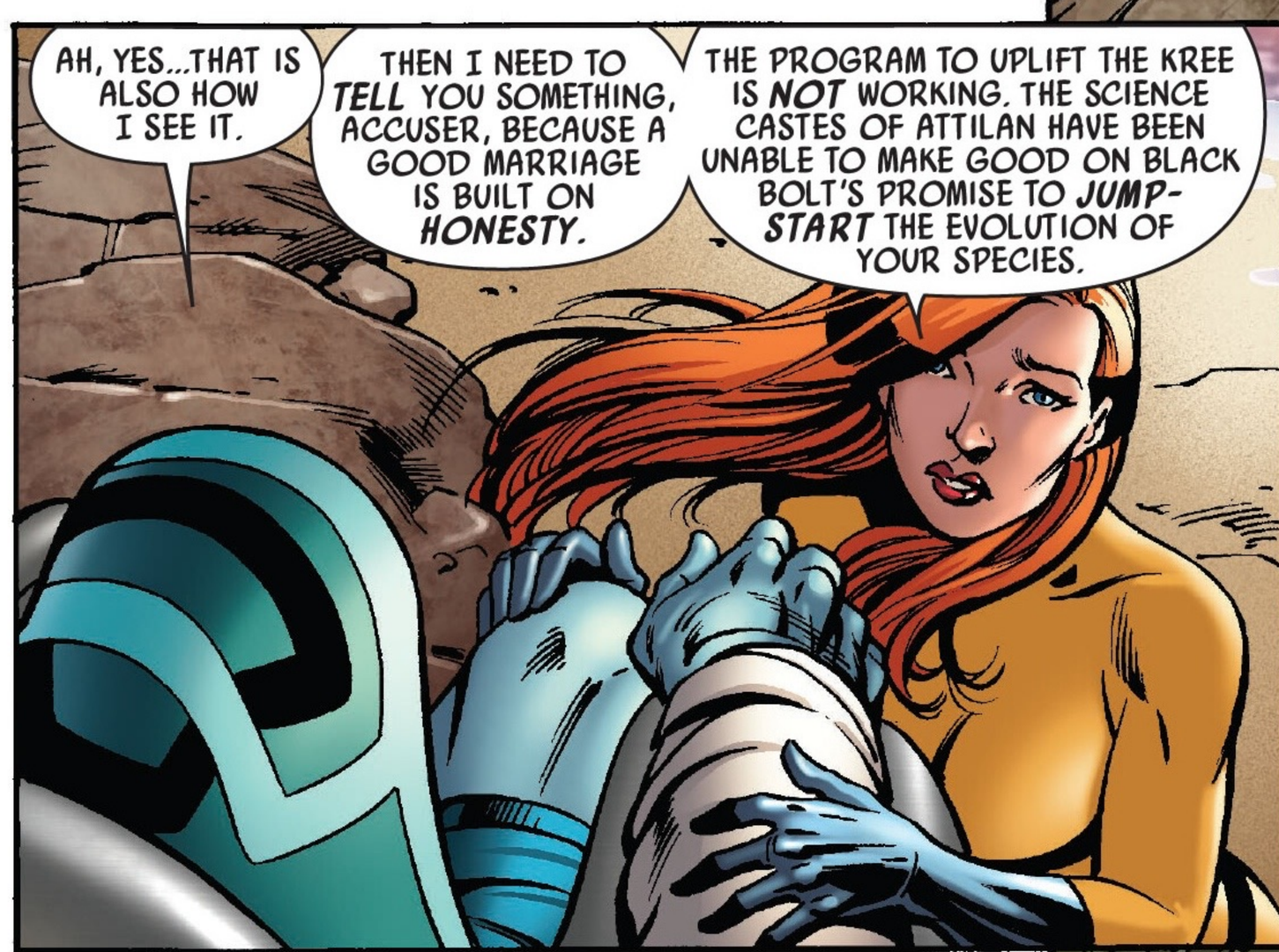
DESPITE THEIR *VAST* RESOURCES, VULCAN'S PROGRAM OF EXPANSION HAS *DRAINED* THEM.

SO WE ARE JUST A STUBBORN ADVERSARY WHO HAS APPEARED AT THE *LEAST* OPPORTUNE MOMENT.

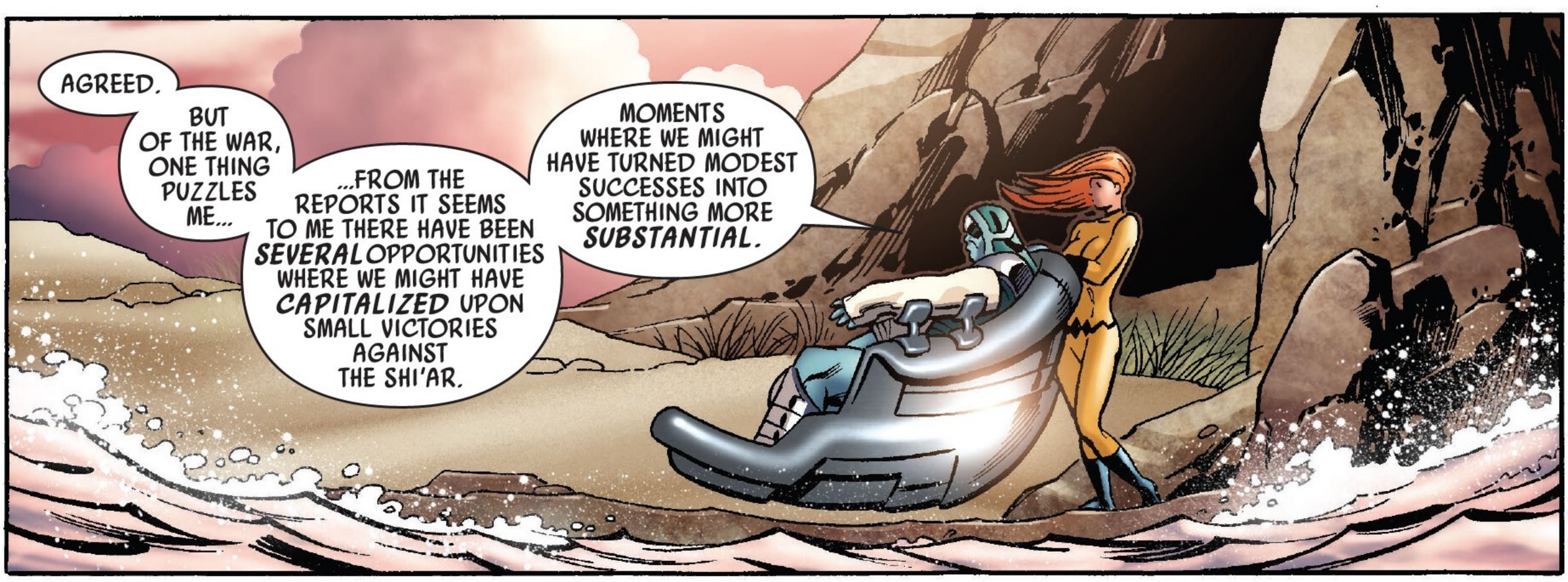
THE AVERAGE SHI'AR SOLDIER FIGHTS THIS WAR BECAUSE HE'S BEEN ORDERED TO, AND BECAUSE HE'S AFRAID OF VULCAN.
THE AVERAGE KREE SOLDIER FIGHTS BECAUSE HE REMEMBERS WHAT THE SHI'AR INFLICTED ON US IN THE LAST CONFLICT.
IN ANY WAR, I'D ALWAYS BACK THE SIDE THAT'S FIGHTING WITH SPIRIT.

JUST NOW, YOU MENTIONED OUR MARRIAGE, LORD RONAN.
THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM EMBODIES THE CONCEPT OF MARRIAGE, DOES IT NOT?
AS SYMBOLIZED BY THEIR GODS, SHARRA AND KY'THRI... GODS WHO WERE FORCED INTO MARRIAGE AGAINST THEIR WILL, AND IN THAT UNION FOUND STRENGTH.
THAT'S WHAT THE IMPERIUM DOES. IT MARRIES OTHER CULTURES BY MEANS OF SHOTGUN WEDDINGS.

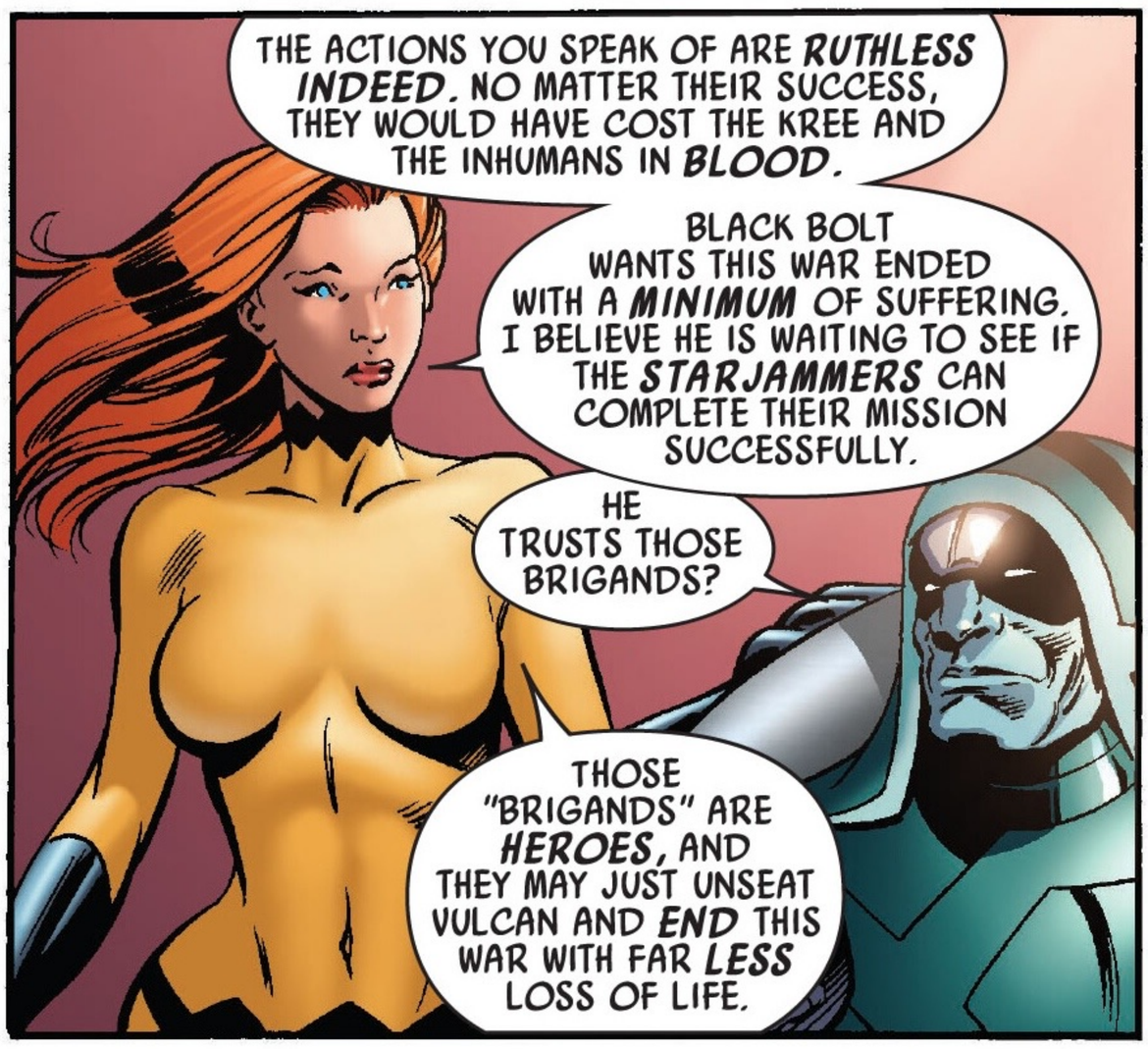

I SEE OUR DYNASTIC UNION RATHER MORE AS AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE. TWO PARTIES WHO UNITE IN A BOND OF MUTUAL CARE AND KINSHIP.
OF COURSE.
YOU MEAN... THE KREE AND THE INHUMANS?


AH, YES...THAT IS ALSO HOW I SEE IT.
THEN I NEED TO TELL YOU SOMETHING, ACCUSER, BECAUSE A GOOD MARRIAGE IS BUILT ON HONESTY.
THE PROGRAM TO UPLIFT THE KREE IS NOT WORKING. THE SCIENCE CASTES OF ATTILAN HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO MAKE GOOD ON BLACK BOLT'S PROMISE TO JUMP-START THE EVOLUTION OF YOUR SPECIES.

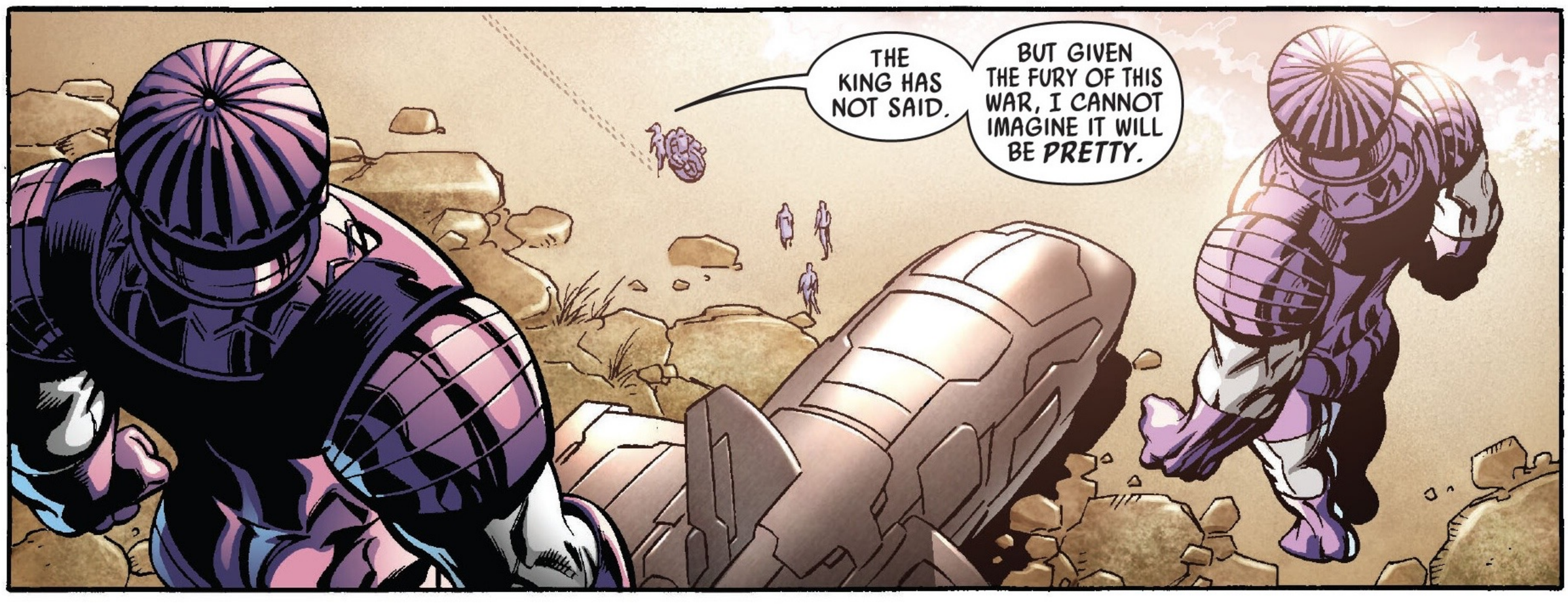
I BELIEVE THAT YOU AND I SHOULD STAND TOGETHER AND APPROACH BLACK BOLT ON THIS ISSUE WITH ALL URGENCY.
IF WE WAIT UNTIL THIS WAR IS DONE, IT MAY BE FAR TOO LATE, AND THE KREE WILL HAVE BEEN LEFT BEHIND.


AGREED.
BUT OF THE WAR, ONE THING PUZZLES ME...
...FROM THE REPORTS IT SEEMS TO ME THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL OPPORTUNITIES WHERE WE MIGHT HAVE CAPITALIZED UPON SMALL VICTORIES AGAINST THE SHI'AR.
MOMENTS WHERE WE MIGHT HAVE TURNED MODEST SUCCESSES INTO SOMETHING MORE SUBSTANTIAL.

IT SEEMS THAT OUR KING, BLACK BOLT, IS HOLDING BACK FROM TAKING THE MOST RUTHLESS AND DECISIVE ACTIONS.


THE ACTIONS YOU SPEAK OF ARE RUTHLESS INDEED. NO MATTER THEIR SUCCESS, THEY WOULD HAVE COST THE KREE AND THE INHUMANS IN BLOOD.
BLACK BOLT WANTS THIS WAR ENDED WITH A MINIMUM OF SUFFERING. I BELIEVE HE IS WAITING TO SEE IF THE STARJAMMERS CAN COMPLETE THEIR MISSION SUCCESSFULLY.
HE TRUSTS THOSE BRIGANDS?
THOSE "BRIGANDS" ARE HEROES, AND THEY MAY JUST UNSEAT VULCAN AND END THIS WAR WITH FAR LESS LOSS OF LIFE.

AND IF THEY FAIL?
I BELIEVE THERE IS A CONTINGENCY PLAN.
AND WHAT DOES THIS CONTINGENCY PLAN CONSIST OF?


THE KING HAS NOT SAID.
BUT GIVEN THE FURY OF THIS WAR, I CANNOT IMAGINE IT WILL BE PRETTY.

CHANDILAR, THE SHI'AR THRONEWORLD.

FOR ALL MY POWER, I AM IN AWE OF THE *INFLUENCE* THE EMPRESS WIELDS.

ONE WORD FROM HER, ONE *SPARK*, AND THE FIRE SPREADS THROUGH THE OLD, DRY TINDER OF THE IMPERIUM.

THROUGH THE POPULATIONS VULCAN HAS *OPPRESSED* DURING HIS RULE, THROUGH THE FIEFDOMS AND NOBLE HOUSES HE HAS *DISPOSSESSED* OR *SILENCED*.

THROUGH THOSE DIVISIONS OF THE SHI'AR MILITARY HE HAS *SQUANDERED* IN HIS WARS OF EXPANSION OR SIMPLY USED *TOO HARD*.

THROUGH THE GREAT UNDERGROUND NETWORK OF DISSENTERS WHO HAVE RISKED EXECUTION BY KEEPING THE NAME *LILANDRA NERAMANI* ALIVE.

THE FIRE SPREADS FAST, AND BURNS *BRIGHT*.

IT BURNS IN THE FORM OF DISCONTENT, OF SECRET *SABOTAGE* TO THE IMPERIAL INTELFEED NETWORK, OF *OPEN REVOLT* ON FOUNDRY WORLDS.

AND IT BURNS HERE IN THE *AERIE* TONIGHT.

WHO GOES THERE?

THE FUTURE.

PRAETOR! IT IS A BLESSING TO SEE YOU!

I CANNOT CLAIM THAT TITLE ANYMORE, COUNCILLOR D'BEK.

IT WILL BE AWARDED TO YOU *AGAIN*, SOON ENOUGH. OF THAT I AM *CERTAIN!*

COUNCILLOR D'BEK'S SEQUENCE REMAINED LOYAL TO LILANDRA WHEN THE INFLUENTIAL *ARAKI SEQUENCE* SWUNG THE COUNCIL'S SUPPORT TO VULCAN.

"...AND CHANCELLOR ARAKI BELIEVES THEY HAVE BEEN CALLED FOR AN EXTRAORDINARY PARLIAMENT TO DISCUSS MILITARY POLICY."

WHEN HAS THIS HOUSE EVER SHIED AWAY FROM THE VICISSITUDES OF WAR?

THE KREE STELLAR EMPIRE IS AN AGE-OLD FOE THAT MUST BE PUT DOWN!

GLADLY.
L-LILANDRA? HERE? SEIZE HER! SEIZE HER NOW!
OH, I DON'T THINK SO.
YOU WILL NOT TOUCH HER!

YOUR PERNICIOUS SECRET ORDER HAS MANIPULATED THE FATE OF THE IMPERIUM FOR TOO LONG, ARAKI.
THIS IS A COUP! WHEN VULCAN LEARNS OF THIS HE WILL SLAUGHTER YOU ALL! HE WILL--
THIS IS NO COUP! THIS IS A RESTORATION OF LEGAL AUTHORITY!
I AM LILANDRA NERAMANI, MAJESTRIX OF THE SHI'AR! I RECLAIM THE THRONE OF THE AERIE BY RIGHT OF MY BLOOD SEQUENCE!
MY FIRST ACTS WILL BE TO OUTLAW THE USURPER VULCAN AND END THIS DISASTROUS WAR WITH THE KREE!
WHAT SAYS THE HIGH COUNCIL?!
MA-JES-TRIX! MA-JES-TRIX! MA-JES-TRIX!

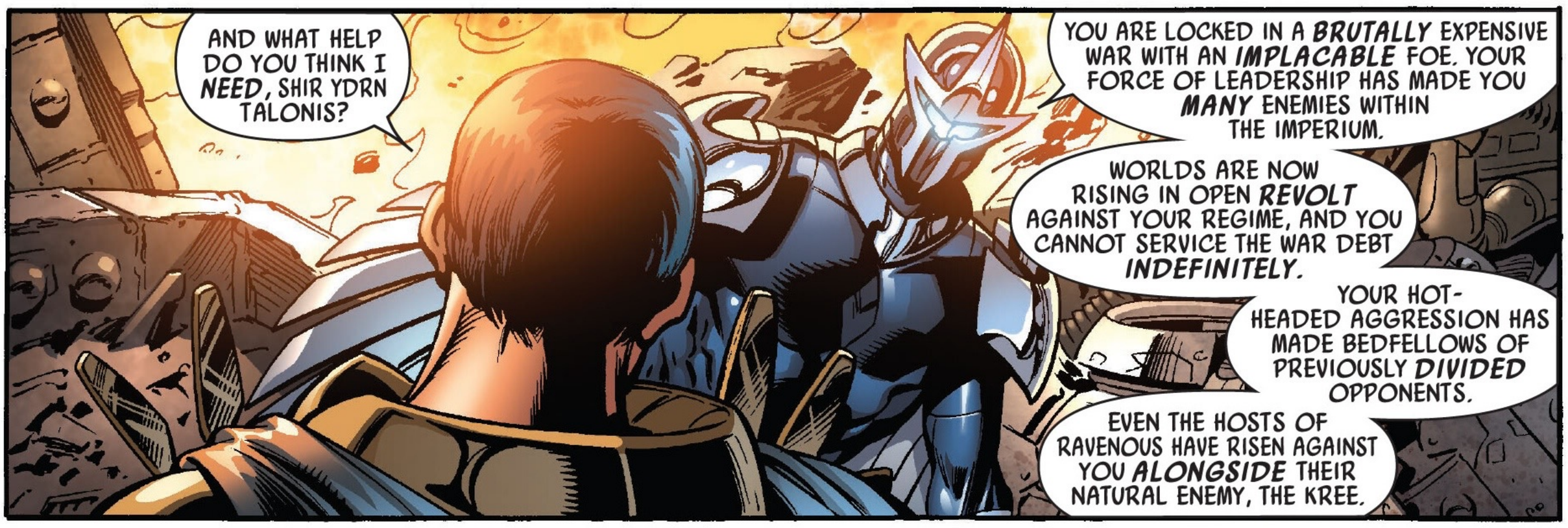
KON-SHOR.

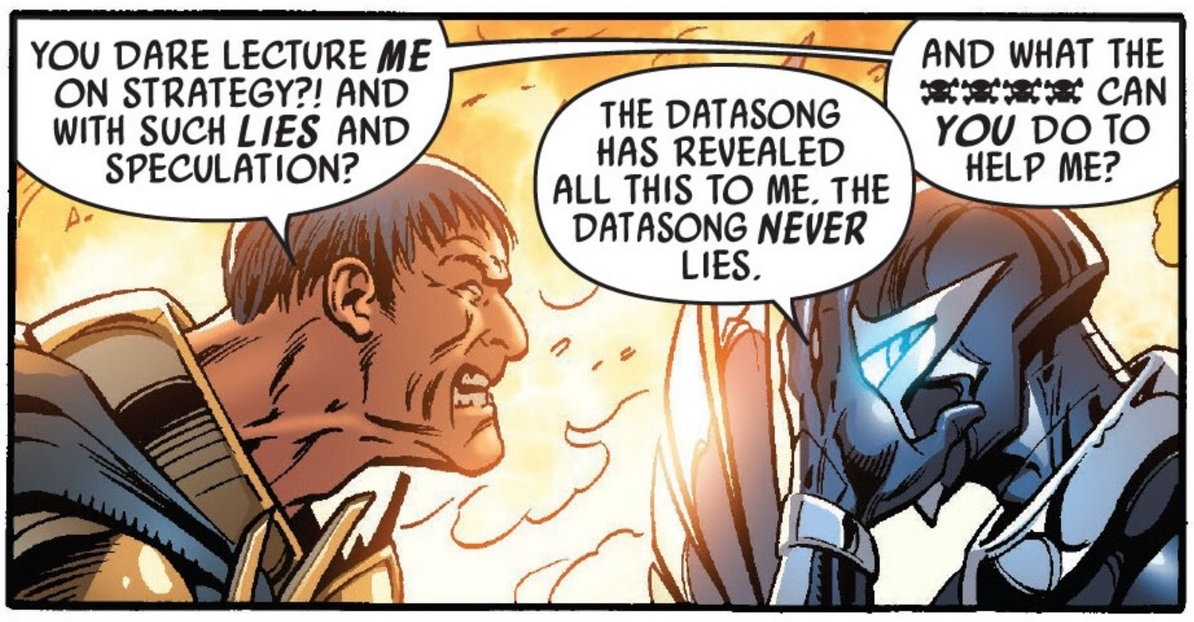
START AT THE TOP AND KEEP IT *SIMPLE*.

I AM *SHIR YDRN TALONIS*, OF THE *FRATERNITY OF RAPTORS*. I AM ALSO KNOWN AS *TALON*.

AND THIS *FRATERNITY*, TALON, IT'S SOME KIND OF *WARRIORS' LODGE?*

IT IS AN *ANCIENT* ORDER, FOUNDED WHEN THE GALAXY WAS *YOUNG*. IT HAS A *SINGLE* DUTY-- TO PROTECT AND DIRECT THE *GREAT PURPOSE*.





....THERE. THEY FALL UPON THE CEDED TERRITORIES FROM THE NEGATIVE ZONE THROUGH PORTALS MANUFACTURED BY THE COSMIC ROD KING BLASTAAR NOW WIELDS.

RAVENOUS'S ENCLAVE WILL NOT LAST ANOTHER WEEK.

NOW TELL ME...HOW DO YOU INTEND TO DEAL WITH LILANDRA NERAMANI'S COUP ON CHANDILAR?
WHAT? WHAT?!

LIES! LIES! I WOULD HAVE HEARD SOMETHING IF SUCH AN OUTRAGE HAD OCCURRED!
THE INTELFEED HAS BEEN SABOTAGED BY YOUR OPPONENTS, MAJESTOR.
BUT THE DATASONG IS BEYOND THEIR REACH. LILANDRA IS IN THE HIGH COUNCIL RIGHT NOW, DEMANDING YOUR CENSURE.

NO! NO!! I'LL NEVER GET BACK TO CHANDILAR IN TIME TO--
CALM YOURSELF, MAJESTOR.
I SAID I WOULD PROTECT YOU, AND I WILL.

THE CONCOURSE OF THE AERIE, CHANDILAR.
THE FIRE SPREADS.
IN LESS THAN AN HOUR, THE CITY CENTER IS CHOKED WITH SCREAMING CROWDS.
BUT SOME ARE NOT REJOICING. PRO-VULCAN MOBS RIOT IN THE STREETS AROUND THE CHANCELLERY.
THAT'S WHEN SHE DECIDES TO WALK TO THE TEMPLE.
THIS IS A BAD IDEA.
TO CONSOLIDATE MY CLAIM, I MUST GO TO THE TEMPLE OF SHARRA AND K'YTHRI AND RENEW MY OATH.
THEN THE COUNCIL AND THE CHIEFS OF STAFF CAN PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE TO ME AT THE HIGH ALTAR.
WE GRASP THE RITUAL SIGNIFICANCE, LILANDRA. IT'S THE "WALKING ACROSS THE CONCOURSE TO GET THERE" PART THAT HAVOK IS HAVING TROUBLE WITH.

I'M NOT VULCAN, LORNA.
I NEED TO SHOW THE PEOPLE THAT I'VE RETURNED, AND THAT I'M ONE OF THEM. I NEED TO WALK AMONG THEM WITHOUT FEAR.
THIS WILL NOT STAND! YOU HAVE WOEFULLY MISREAD THE WILLINGNESS OF THE SHI'AR TO ACCEPT REGIME CHANGE IN A TIME OF WAR!
AND YOU'VE MISREAD MY WILLINGNESS TO LISTEN TO YOU TALK CRAP, ARAKI.

RACHEL, WHAT'S THE SITUATION?
MY HEAD'S SPINNING. SO MANY MINDS PACKED IN TIGHT. PROTESTORS AND SUPPORTERS ALIKE...
THE MENTAL CHATTER IS DEAFENING... ANGER, JOY, FEAR, CONFUSION...
THE MAJESTRIX WILL BE PERFECTLY SAFE. SHE IS UNDER MY PROTECTION.

HAVE I MISJUDGED THE MOOD OF THE PEOPLE, KALLARK?
DO THEY REALLY LOVE VULCAN?
OF COURSE NOT, MAJESTRIX.
I TELL HER NO, BUT I AM DISMAYED.

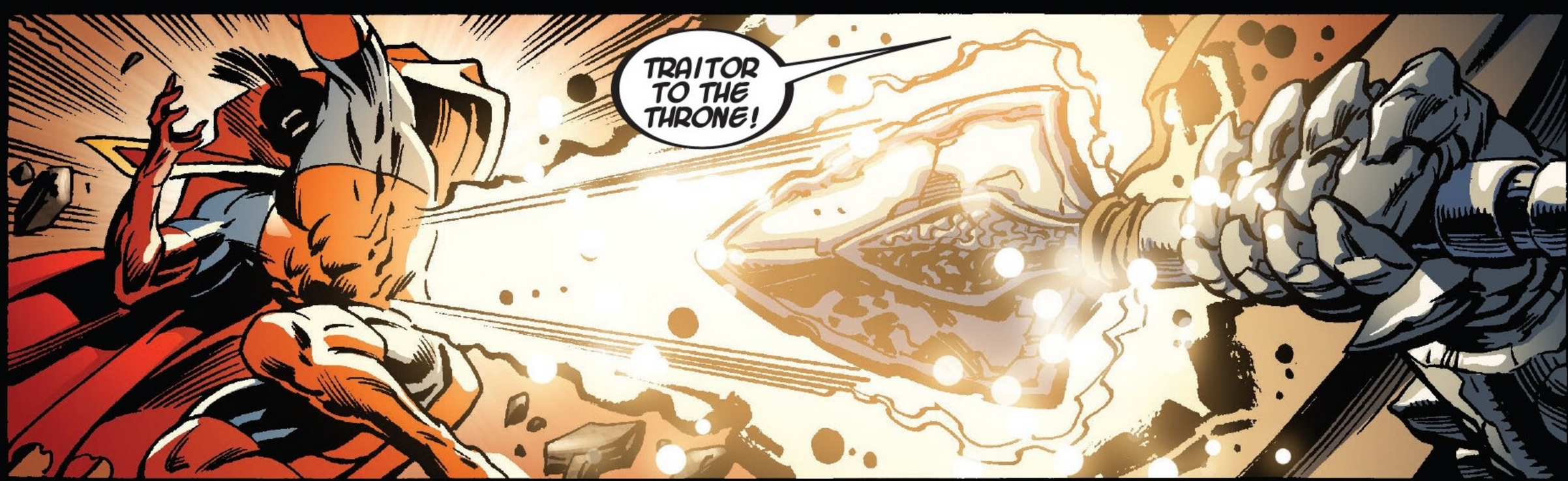
I DIDN'T EXPECT ANY POPULAR DISSENT. I--
WHAT THE HELL IS THIS? MIST...OUT OF NOWHERE?
IT'S NOT MIST! I MEAN, IT'S NOT JUST MIST! IT'S IN MY MIND TOO!
OH MY GOD, I'VE FELT THIS BEFORE!

INCOMING!
AGGHH!
AIIGHHH!
D'BEK! NO!
SHUNK
THE DEATH COMMANDOS. CHANCELLOR ARAKI'S COVERT WETWORK SQUAD.
I CAN'T BELIEVE HE'D TRY SOMETHING THIS BRAZEN.

THESE ARE THE BASTARDS WHO MURDERED MY FAMILY!
RACHEL! GET A GRIP! YOU'RE NO GOOD TO US WITH YOUR MIND CLOUDED!
TAKE KORVUS AND GET LILANDRA INTO COVER!
CALL OFF YOUR KILLERS!
I DIDN'T CALL THEM IN.
BUT I APPLAUD THEIR WORK.
GET THE MAJESTRIX TO COVER!
SKRNTCHS
METAL WINGS? TRY AGAIN.
AIIGHH!
UNHAND ME!
I AM YOUR EMPRESS!
COME ON!
I CAN'T--
COME ON!

HYPERNOVA FIRST. SHE PLASMA-FRIES *TWO* LOYAL COUNCILMEN BEFORE I PUT HER DOWN.
WARSHOT NEXT.
BY THE TIME FLAW THE WARSKRULL HITS ME, I CAN HEAR ARAKI *LAUGHING* AND *SHOUTING* OVER THE TUMULT.
PANIC HAS SEIZED THE CONCOURSE. A *HUNDRED THOUSAND* PEOPLE ARE CAUGHT IN ITS GRIP.

I HEAR EXPLOSIONS, SCREAMS. I HEAR SOMEONE SHRIEKING MY NAME.
KALLARK! GLADIATOR!


TRAITOR TO THE THRONE!

KILL HER! FIND THE FALSE EMPRESS AND KILL HER!

DEATH TO THE FALSE EMPRESS!
THIS IS THE FUTURE SHE BRINGS US!
THROW HER BACK WHERE SHE CAME!
MOVE, YOUR HIGHNESS!
KEEP GOING! GET OUT OF THE OPEN!
IS THIS WHAT THEY THINK OF ME?

WATCH OUT!
IS THI--
OW!
WHERE'S THE SHOOTER? WHERE'S THE SHOOTER?

THERE! HE'S--

WHAT THE HELL--?! HOW DID HE CHANGE--

HE'S GONE! HE JUST VANISHED!
KORVUS? KORVUS, WE--

OH NO. OH NO NO NO.
AND THAT IS THE MOMENT...

...WHEN THE FIRE GOES OUT.
KING TAKES QUEEN

WAR OF KINGS 5

WORD OF LILANDRA'S DEATH COMES TO US EARLY ON WHAT TURNS OUT TO BE THE LAST DAY OF THE KREE-SHI'AR WAR.
I AM NOT PRESENT WHEN KARNAK DELIVERS THE NEWS TO BLACK BOLT. I HEAR ABOUT IT LATER.
MAXIMUS FINDS ME AND SAYS, "CRYSTAL! CRYSTAL, HAVE YOU HEARD THE TERRIBLE THING?"
IT CUTS ME TO THE QUICK. LILANDRA WAS A TOWERING FIGURE. I ADMIRED HER DETERMINATION AND DEVOTION, HER LEADERSHIP AND STATECRAFT.
IN HER LIFE, SHE EMBODIED HOPE FOR PEACE. IN HER DEATH, SHE PRESAGES NOTHING BUT MORE DEATH...
...DEATH, AND THE GRINDING CONTINUATION OF A WAR NOBODY WANTS.
In RAGE and BLOOD and FIRE

ATTILAN, THE ROYAL CITY OF THE INHUMANS.
MY KING?
LORD BLACK BOLT, DID YOU HEAR WHAT COUSIN KARNAK SAID?
THE STRATEGY CHAMPIONED BY HAVOK AND HIS STARJAMMERS HAS FAILED WRETCHEDLY.
THE KING HEARD HIM, GORGON...

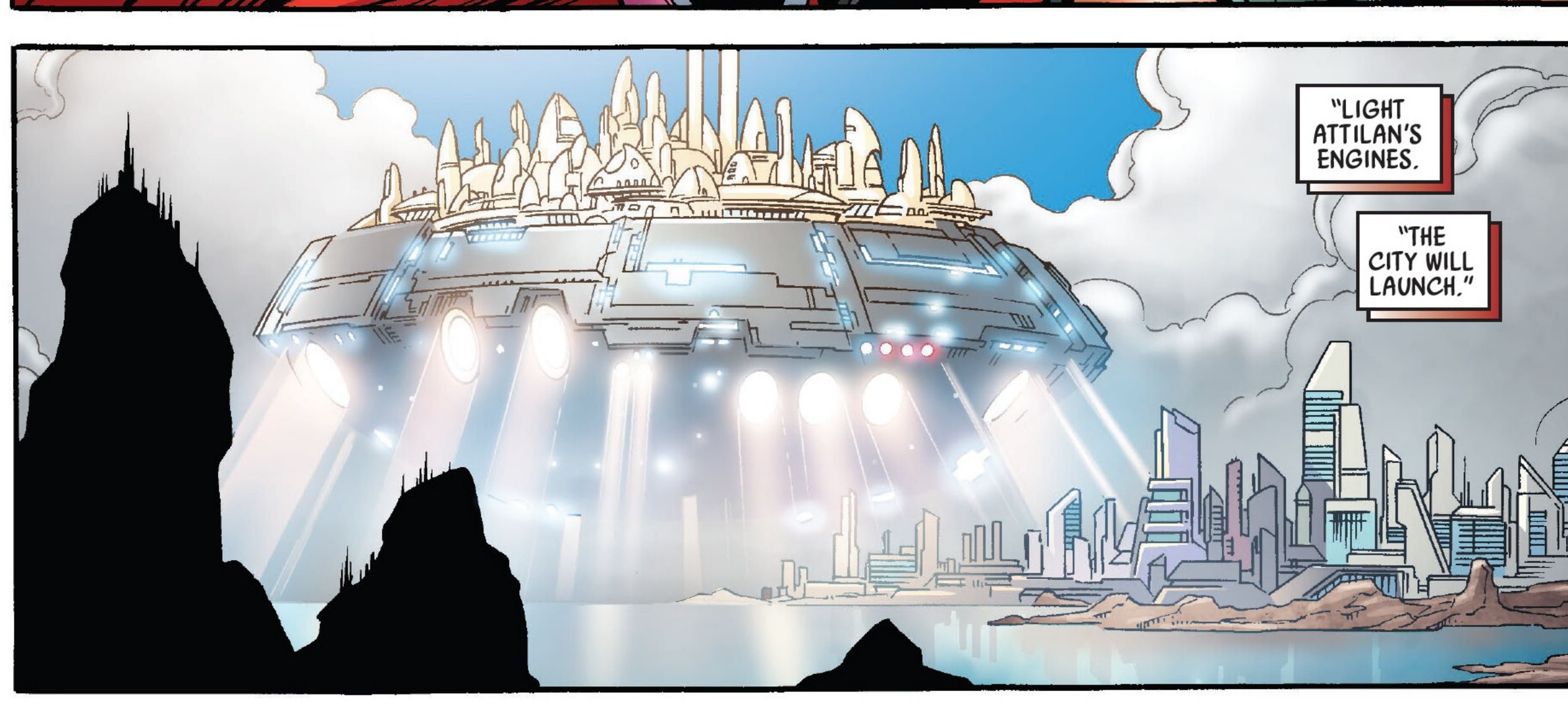
...HE IS MUTE, NOT DEAF.
THE NERAMANI WOMAN'S DEATH IS A PITY. A PERIOD OF STATE MOURNING WILL BE OBSERVED.

RESPECTFUL OBSERVANCES ASIDE, MY QUEEN, LILANDRA NERAMANI'S MURDER REPRESENTS A TURNING POINT IN THIS WAR WITH THE SHI'AR.
LILANDRA WAS AN INSTRUMENT WE WERE USING TO BRING ABOUT A PREMATURE FINISH TO THIS CONFLICT. SHE MIGHT HAVE ENDED THIS WITHOUT FURTHER LOSS OF BLOOD.

THE FAILURE OF THE NERAMANI GAMBIT MEANS THAT WE WILL EITHER HAVE TO SEE THIS WAR OUT TO ITS EXHAUSTIVE CONCLUSION...
...OR SWITCH TO THE COUNTER PLAN.
UH...WHAT COUNTER PLAN IS THIS, COUSIN?

THIS IS THE ROUTE WE DID NOT WANT TO WALK, MY HUSBAND. NOT YET.
THIS COULD BE AN ACT THE GALAXY MAY NEVER FORGIVE US FOR...

BLACK BOLT HAS SPOKEN. WE MUST END THIS WAR WITH THE SHI'AR AS QUICKLY AND FINALLY AS POSSIBLE.
THE INTERTWINED DESTINY OF THE KREE AND THE INHUMANS DEPENDS UPON IT.
WE WILL GO WITH THE COUNTER PLAN, AND TRUST THAT POSTERITY WILL COME TO ABSOLVE US.
I CONCUR, MEDUSA.
NO ONE SAID ANYTHING TO GORGON ABOUT ANY COUNTER PLAN...


"LIGHT ATTILAN'S ENGINES.
"THE CITY WILL LAUNCH."

I WASN'T THERE WHEN VULCAN LEARNED OF HER DEATH.

I CAN ONLY PRESUME HE WAS *DELIGHTED*.

HA HA HA HA!

OH, THAT'S... CHOICE.

THE IMPERIAL SHI'AR FLAGSHIP HAMMER II.

COME ON, KA'ARDUM! WHAT'S THE *MATTER* WITH YOU ALL?

SHE'S *DEAD!* SHE'S OUT OF MY FACE *FOREVER!*

I REMEMBER ALL THE TIMES HE SAID TO ME, "KALLARK, COULD YOU JUST KILL HER FOR ME? COULD YOU?"

THE NERAMANI'S DEATH *CONSOLIDATES* YOUR POSITION, MAJESTOR.

BUT I WISH YOU HAD *REMEMBERED* MY COUNSEL.

STAY ON YOUR KNEES, KA'ARDUM. I'LL BE EXECUTING YOU THERE SHORTLY.
YOU. TALON. YOUR FRATERNITY OF RAPTORS PROMISED ME A GREAT DEAL.
WHICH WE PROVIDED, MAJESTOR. THE NERAMANI FEMALE IS SLAIN.
MY THRONE IS IMPERILLED AS A DIRECT CONSEQUENCE! YOU'RE RUINING MY EMPIRE!

IT'S NOT YOUR EMPIRE.
WHAT?
THE DATASONG EMPOWERS MY FRATERNITY WITH THE ABILITY TO DIVINE FUTURE OUTCOMES, TO PSYCHOHISTORICALLY PREDICT AND INFLUENCE THE PATTERN OF EVENTS ACROSS MILLENNIA.
IT IS HOW WE ADVANCE THE GREAT PURPOSE. IT IS HOW WE SHAPE AND STRENGTHEN THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM.
IT IS NOT YOUR EMPIRE.
YOU ARE MERELY THE CURRENT CUSTODIAN.

I AM EMPEROR VULCAN!
YOU ARE...FOR NOW.
I WILL GO DIRECTLY TO CHANDILAR AND DEFUSE THE CIVIL UNREST.
IF YOU WANT THE CONTINUED BACKING OF MY FRATERNITY, YOU WILL STAY HERE AND PREPARE TO DISENGAGE YOUR FORCES.
HELLO?! THERE'S A WAR GOING ON!

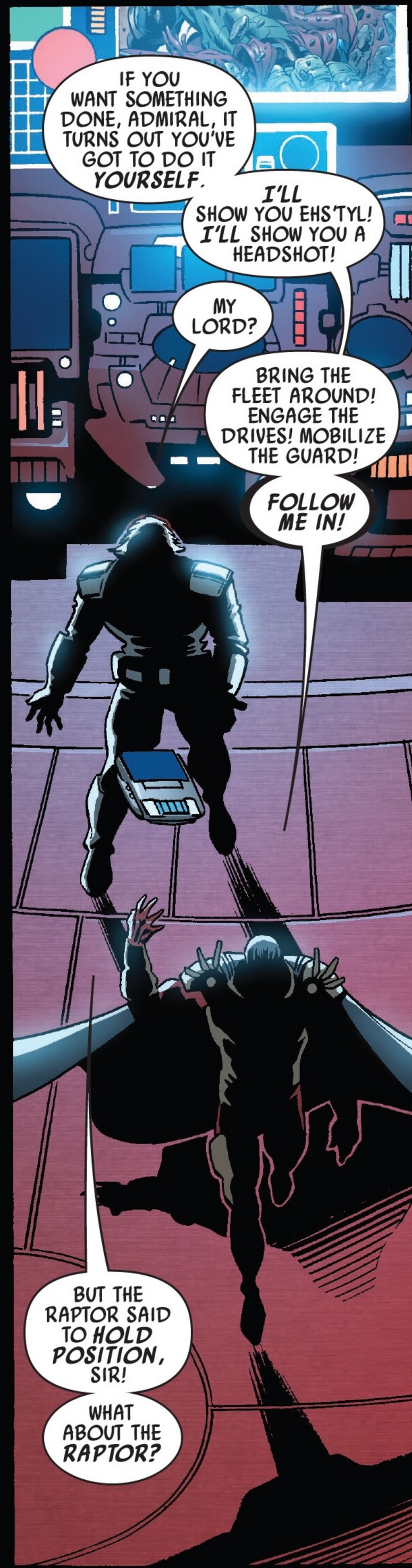
IT MUST END. AND YOU MUST PROVE TO US THAT YOU ARE A MAJESTOR WORTH SUPPORTING.
IF WE DEEM YOU UNVIABLE, WE WILL INVEST OUR EFFORTS IN AN ALTERNATIVE CANDIDATE.
YOU ☠☠☠☠! I'VE KILLED MEN FOR SAYING LESS!

THAT COULD WELL EXPLAIN THE TROUBLE YOU'RE IN.
"I'VE NEVER HEARD ANYONE SPEAK TO HIM THAT WAY, ADMIRAL."

NEITHER HAVE I, CAPTAIN.
THIS HAS JUST COME THROUGH THE INTELFEED. HE'LL HAVE TO SEE IT.

THE INHUMAN CITY ATTILAN HAS LAUNCHED FROM HALA AND IS IN TRANSIT TOWARDS SHI'AR SPACE.
WE MAY DRAW FROM THIS THAT THE INHUMANS MEAN TO STRIKE DIRECTLY AGAINST US. AN EHS'TYL ASSAULT TO END THE WAR JUST AS OURS BEGAN IT.

EHS'TYL. HNH. WHAT USE IS A DECAPITATION STRIKE IF IT DOESN'T TAKE OFF THE HEAD?
THE IMPERIAL GUARD BOTCHED THE RAID, AND THIS DRAWN-OUT BLOODSHED HAS BEEN THE CONSEQUENCE.
THEY SHOULD HAVE KILLED BLACK BOLT THEN AND THERE.
MY LORD, I PRESUME WE ARE TO HOLD STATION AS THE RAPTOR ADVISED?

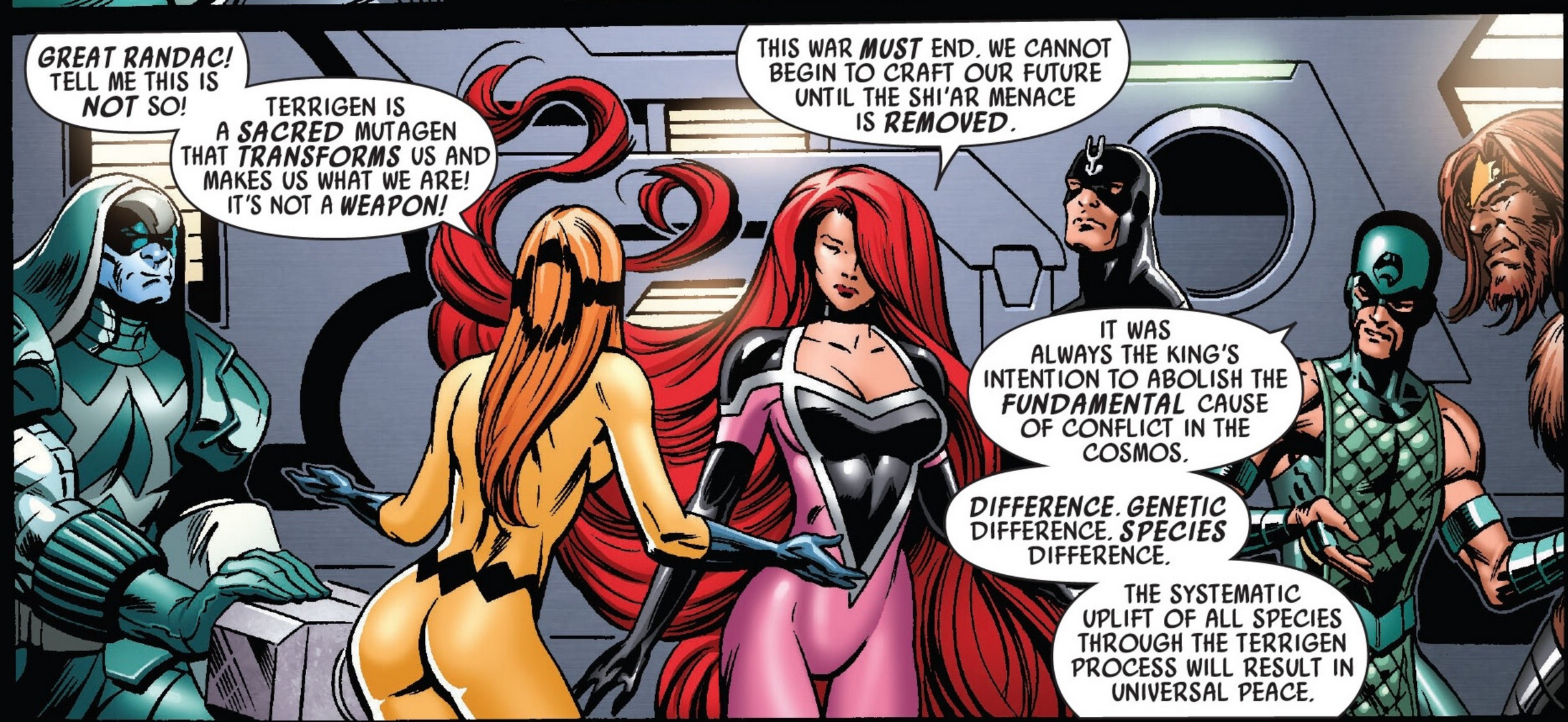

IF YOU WANT SOMETHING DONE, ADMIRAL, IT TURNS OUT YOU'VE GOT TO DO IT YOURSELF.
I'LL SHOW YOU EHS'TYL! I'LL SHOW YOU A HEADSHOT!
MY LORD?
BRING THE FLEET AROUND! ENGAGE THE DRIVES! MOBILIZE THE GUARD!
FOLLOW ME IN!
BUT THE RAPTOR SAID TO HOLD POSITION, SIR!
WHAT ABOUT THE RAPTOR?

HE CAN BURN IN HELL.

ATTILAN, APPROACHING THE SHI'AR FRONTIER.
"GET OUT OF MY WAY!"

HNNGH!
WHY DID YOU SET GORGON TO KEEP US OUT OF THE INNER HALL? WHY HAS ATTILAN LAUNCHED?
MEDUSA? WHAT'S GOING ON? MAXIMUS TELLS ME THAT LILANDRA IS DEAD.
AND AS A RESULT WE HAVE SWITCHED TO OUR CONTINGENCY PLAN.
WHICH IS...?

OH, THAT WOULD BE THE ONE I BUILT FOR THE KING, CRYSTAL.
WHAT DID YOU BUILD? WHAT DID YOU BUILD, MAXIMUS?
I CALLED IT THE UTTERANCE OF DESTINY, BUT THEY NAMED IT THE T-BOMB.
BASICALLY, IT'S WEAPONIZED TERRIGEN...

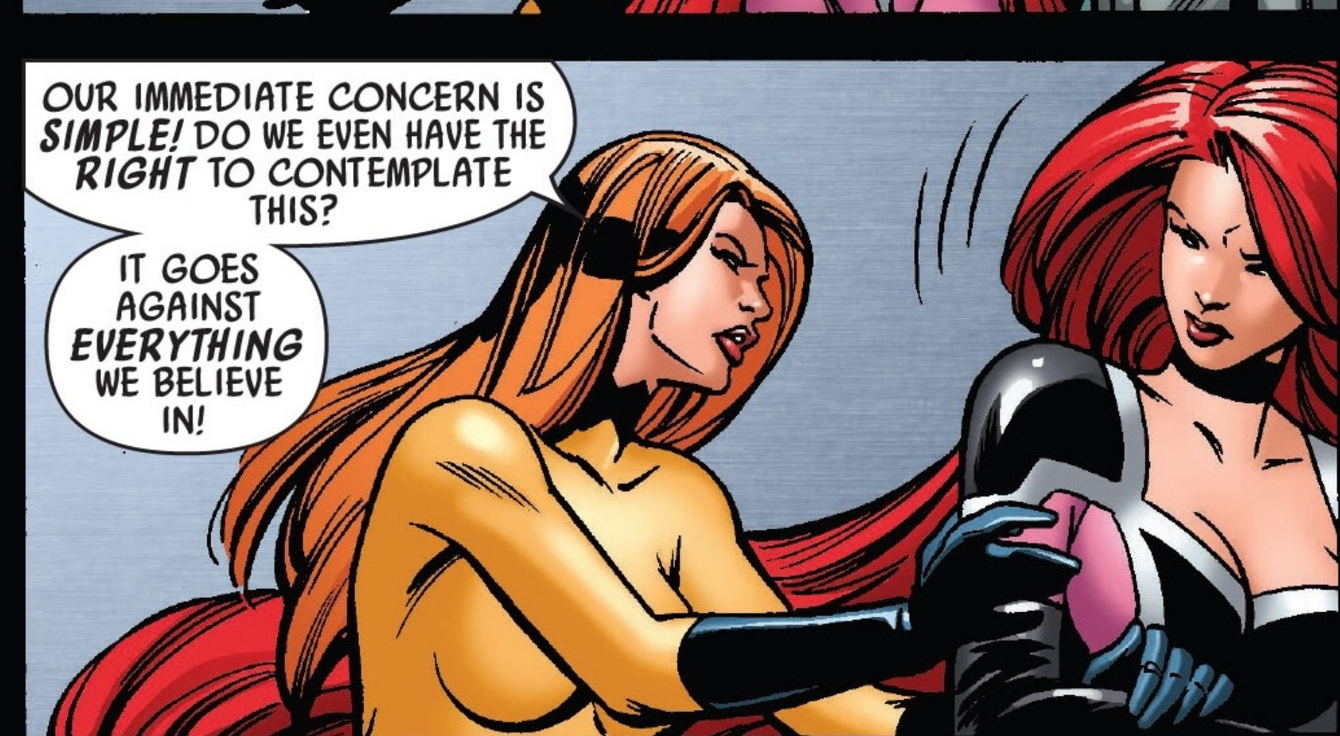

GREAT RANDAC! TELL ME THIS IS NOT SO!
TERRIGEN IS A SACRED MUTAGEN THAT TRANSFORMS US AND MAKES US WHAT WE ARE! IT'S NOT A WEAPON!
THIS WAR MUST END. WE CANNOT BEGIN TO CRAFT OUR FUTURE UNTIL THE SHI'AR MENACE IS REMOVED.
IT WAS ALWAYS THE KING'S INTENTION TO ABOLISH THE FUNDAMENTAL CAUSE OF CONFLICT IN THE COSMOS.
DIFFERENCE. GENETIC DIFFERENCE. SPECIES DIFFERENCE.
THE SYSTEMATIC UPLIFT OF ALL SPECIES THROUGH THE TERRIGEN PROCESS WILL RESULT IN UNIVERSAL PEACE.

IN A GALAXY WHERE *EVERYONE* IS AN INHUMAN, THERE WILL BE NO MORE LINES OF DIVISION.
AND YOU INTEND TO ACCOMPLISH THIS WITH A *BOMB?*

ORIGINALLY, THE KING INTENDED TO AFFECT THIS DESTINY SYSTEMATICALLY... OVER GENERATIONS.
BUT NOW THE SHI'AR *FORCE* US TO TAKE MORE DRASTIC ACTION.
TO, IN ONE STRIKE, END THIS WAR AND ALL OTHERS.
THE T-BOMB IS POWERED BY *BLACK BOLT'S VOICE.* ON DETONATION, IT WILL SET UP A SHOCKWAVE THAT WILL TRANSMIT THE UPLIFT EFFECT TO *ALL*--

NOT ALL. MY PEOPLE ARE NOT COMPATIBLE WITH YOUR EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS.
YOU WILL UPLIFT THE ENTIRE COSMOS AND LEAVE THE *KREE* BEHIND.
WE WILL BE THE NEW *UNDERCLASS*. THE UNIVERSE'S *ALPHA PRIMITIVES.*

THE KREE QUESTION IS A PROBLEM, ACCUSER, BUT IT WILL BE RESOLVED EVENTUALLY.
OUR IMMEDIATE CONCERN IS--

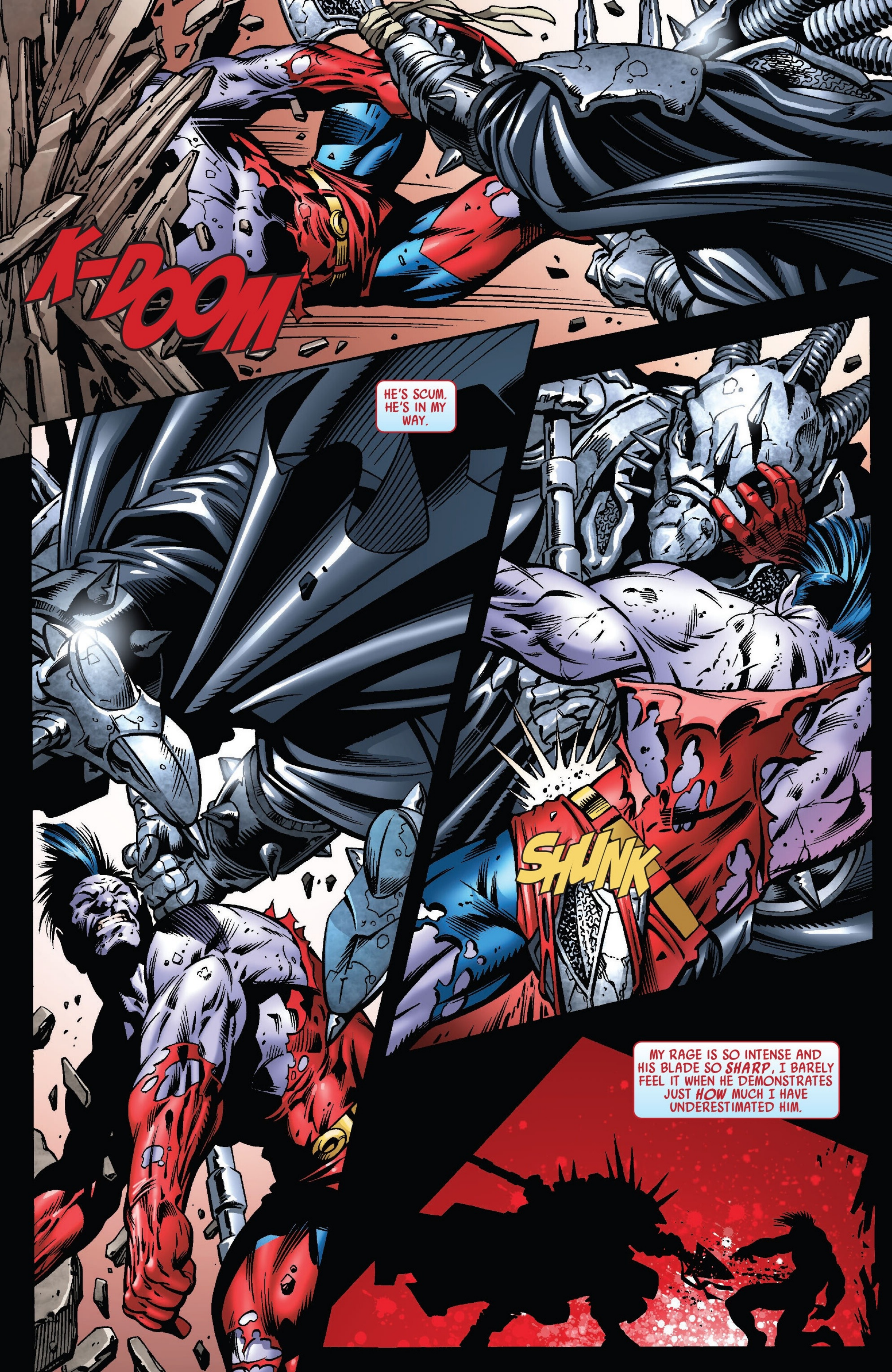

OUR IMMEDIATE CONCERN IS *SIMPLE!* DO WE EVEN HAVE THE *RIGHT* TO CONTEMPLATE THIS?
IT GOES AGAINST *EVERYTHING* WE BELIEVE IN!

IT IS INHUMAN.
SISTER, YOU SHOULD LOOK THE WORD UP.
SINCE WHEN DID WE DARE DECIDE THE FATE OF *ALL THINGS?*
WHEN DID WE BEGIN TO *PRESUME* SO MUCH?

MY LORD, IN THE NAME OF RANDAC, I BEG YOU TO RECONSIDER THIS COURSE OF ACTION.
THE SO-CALLED GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY SHOWED ME THE POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF THIS WAR. THEY SHOWED ME SPACE ITSELF IN COLLAPSE.
THAT AWFUL RISK ASIDE, WE DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO DO THIS.
I IMPLORE YOU...DO NOT TAKE US DOWN THIS PATH.
GREAT KING, IN THE NAME OF PAMA, I ECHO MY WIFE IN THIS REQUEST.
I WILL NOT SEE THE KREE CAST DOWN AND FORGOTTEN. YOU SWORE TO PROTECT THEM.
FURTHERMORE, PEACE IS A COMPLEX, FRAGILE THING...IT CANNOT BE MANUFACTURED IN A SINGLE STRIKE.
PAMA KNOWS, I'VE TRIED THAT OFTEN ENOUGH.
CRYSTAL. RONAN.
FRANKLY, I THINK YOU'RE BOTH BEING PAINFULLY NAIVE. THIS IS THE REAL WORLD.
BUT THE KING WILL CONSIDER YOUR REQUEST.
MEDUSA, W--
ENOUGH! I SPEAK FOR BLACK BOLT.

CHANDILAR, THE SHI'AR THRONEWORLD.
THE OLD CITY BURNS. THE AERIE SHUDDERS.
THE SHI'AR TURN UPON THEMSELVES IN FEAR AND INDIGNATION AND FURY.
SOME FIGHT FOR VULCAN, OTHERS FOR LILANDRA'S GHOST.
OTHERS STILL FOR BOTH AND NEITHER.
I TURN MY LOSS INTO ACTION, MY LAMENT INTO RAGE.
SHE IS GONE AND HOPE HAS GONE WITH HER.

I TURN MY ANGER UPON THE OLD AND SECRET ORDER THAT HAS PULLED THE IMPERIUM'S STRINGS FOR SO LONG.
I TURN AGAINST THE HOUSEHOLD OF THE ARAKI SEQUENCE, ONE OF THE OLDEST AND NOBLEST OF THE GENETIC LINES.
I TURN AGAINST CHANCELLOR ARAKI. IN HIS CORRUPT WAY, HE IS MORE EVIL THAN THE MINDLESS HOOLIGAN VULCAN.
HIS DEATH COMMANDOS MURDERED LILANDRA.
PROTECT ME! BLACK CLOAK, YOU WILL PROTECT ME!
THAT MANIAC IS COMING FOR ME!
GLADIATOR, I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS.
I DON'T SPEAK. I DON'T CARE WHAT THE COVERT OPS COMMANDER KNOWN AS BLACK CLOAK HAS TO SAY.


K-BOOM
HE'S SCUM. HE'S IN MY WAY.
SHUNK
MY RAGE IS SO INTENSE AND HIS BLADE SO SHARP, I BARELY FEEL IT WHEN HE DEMONSTRATES JUST HOW MUCH I HAVE UNDERESTIMATED HIM.

LET ME KILL YOU. YOU SHOULD DIE TODAY, KALLARK.
IT WOULD BE TOO CRUEL FOR YOU TO LIVE WITHOUT HER.

SKKKTCCH

HE WAS THE ONE...

HE MURDERED MY FAMILY.

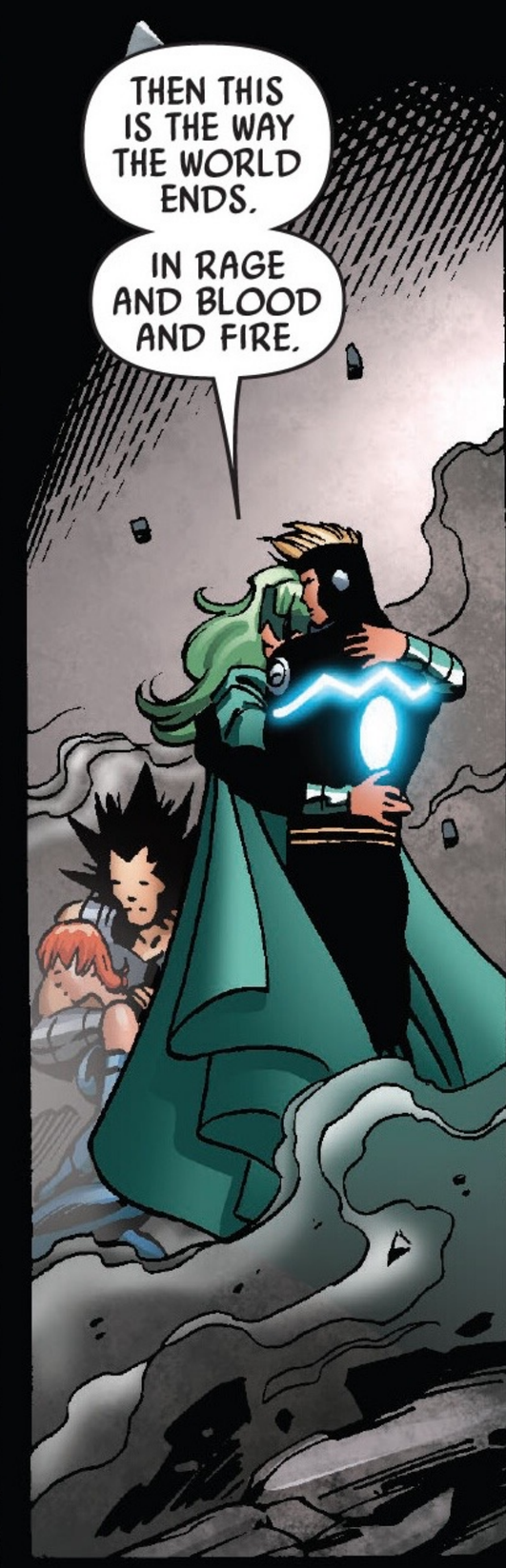
NOT HIM, RACHEL. HE WAS SIMPLY FOLLOWING ORDERS.
IT WAS *ARAKI* WHO PULLED THE TRIGGER.

NO! SHARRA AND K'YTHRI, NOOO!

EEAAARRRRRRHH

HE KILLED MY FAMILY.
WHY DON'T I FEEL ANY *BETTER?*
BECAUSE TODAY'S ABOUT THE WORST WE'VE *EVER* KNOWN.
ALEX, WE *HAVE* TO DO SOMETHING BEFORE CHANDILAR *DISINTEGRATES* AND TAKES THE IMPERIUM WITH IT.
I KNOW, LORNA, I *KNOW*.
BUT THERE'S ONLY *ONE* PERSON WHO COULD *POSSIBLY* STOP THIS NOW. THERE'S ONLY *ONE* PERSON WHO CAN BRING THE SHI'AR PEOPLE BACK FROM THE BRINK.

THE EMPEROR.
EXACTLY.
AND, UNFORTUNATELY, HIS NAME IS *VULCAN* AND HE'S *INSANE*.


THEN THIS IS THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS.
IN RAGE AND BLOOD AND FIRE.

ATTILAN.

WE'VE CROSSED THE FRONTIER INTO SHI'AR SPACE...

...HOW MUCH *LONGER* BEFORE BLACK BOLT GIVES US HIS DECISION?

WHAT'S THAT SOUND?

I THINK HE'S GIVING IT *NOW*.

BLACK BOLT HAS MADE UP HIS MIND.

"THE DELIVERY SYSTEMS HAVE ENGAGED...

"...THE *T-BOMB* HAS LAUNCHED."

NO! HOW COULD HE BE SO--- *NOOOO!*

OH, *SPARE* ME YOUR OUTRAGE.

BLACK BOLT IS LEADING US INTO A FUTURE OF *PEACE* AND *EQUALITY*...

HE IS. HE *SURELY* IS.

SORT OF A SHAME *HE* WON'T BE THERE TO SEE IT, THOUGH.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

WELL, BECAUSE OF THE BOMB, OBVIOUSLY.

MAXIMUS! IN RANDAC'S NAME, *WHAT DO YOU MEAN?!*

THE T-BOMB IS *POWERED* BY HIS VOICE! *HE'S* GOT TO BE THERE! ARE YOU *DENSE* OR SOMETHING?

HE'S GOING TO *SACRIFICE* HIMSELF.

THAT'S *PREPOSTEROUS!*

NO, IT WAS THE PLAN ALL ALONG. BLACK BOLT WAS FULLY PREPARED, IF IT CAME TO IT.

THIS IS HIS *GIFT* TO US!

NOO!
OPEN CHANNELS!
BLACK BOLT! HUSBAND! HEAR ME!
HUSBAND, PLEASE!
WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME?
YOU EXPLAINED TO ME THE T-BOMB CONTINGENCY! YOU TOLD ME WHAT WAS AT STAKE! YOU SHARED THAT WITH ME!
WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME WHAT THE PRICE HAD TO BE?
BLACK BOLT?!
I CAN'T LOSE YOU AGAIN! I LOST YOU TO THE SKRULLS! I WAS MADE TO SHARE A BED WITH THAT FACSIMILE! I WAS WITHOUT YOU FOR SO LONG!
DON'T LEAVE ME AGAIN! DON'T YOU DARE LEAVE ME AGAIN!
BLACK BOLT!
ANSWER ME!

GOODBYE GOODBYE GOODBYE GOODBYE

ECHOPACITOR POWER LEVELS RISING. TEN PERCENT. TWELVE PERCENT...

ATTENTION... ATTENTION...INCOMING CONTACT DETECTED. LAUNCHING DEFENSE SENTRIES...
SENTRY LAUNCH! SENTRY LAUNCH!
ATTENTION... ATTENTION.... SENTRIES NO LONGER RESPONDING...

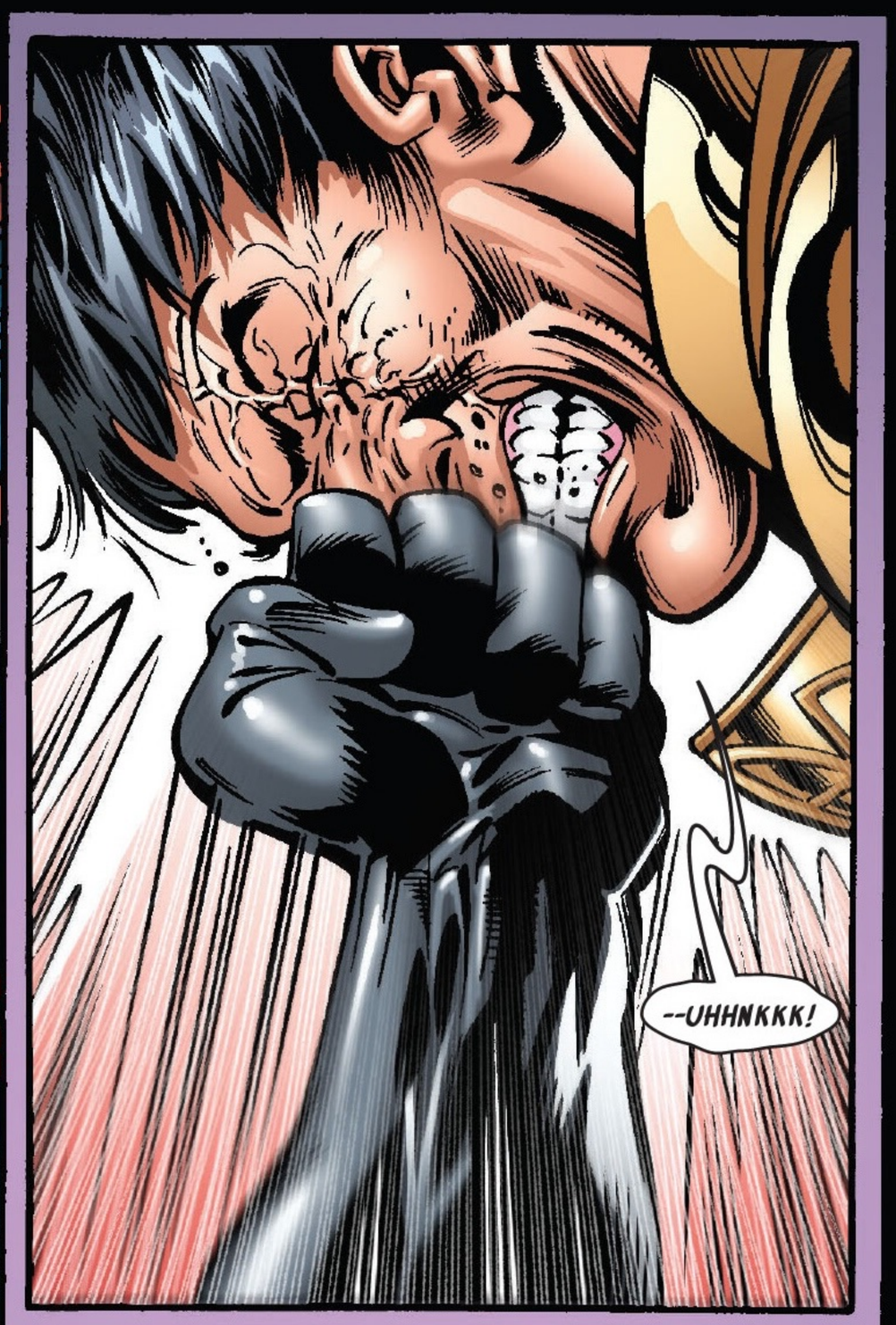
CASING BREACH!
CASING BREACH!
YOU.
LET'S GO.

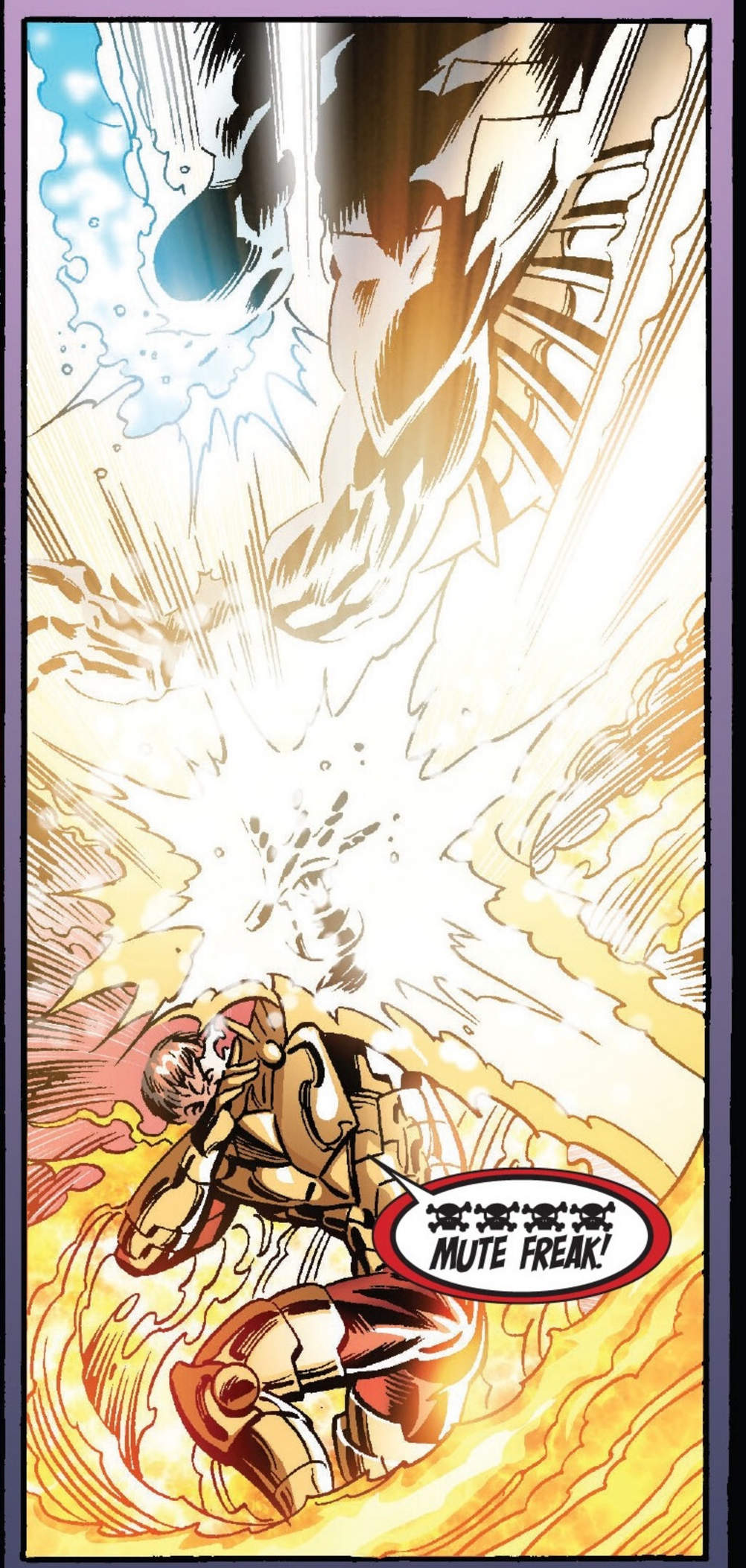
War of Kings: Ascension #1 variant by PAUL PELLETIER, RICK MAGYAR & FRANK D'ARMATA

WAR OF KINGS 6

BLACK BOLT, MY BELOVED COUSIN AND MY KING, HAD ALREADY PILOTED THE T-BOMB ROCKET FAR AHEAD OF ATTILAN.
HE WHISPERED TO THE WEAPON THROUGH THE ECHOPACITOR AND IT WAS BUILDING POWER TO DETONATION LEVEL...BUT THEN VULCAN INTERCEPTED IT.
POWER LEVELS RISING. TWENTY-THREE PERCENT. TWENTY-FIVE PERCENT...
EVERYTHING WE BELIEVED IN HUNG UPON THAT MOMENT. LIKE FEUDAL LORDS OF OLD EARTH, THEIR PERSONAL COMBAT WAS ABOUT TO DECIDE THE FATE OF CIVILIZATIONS.
WAR of KINGS

YOU'RE AS POWERFUL AS THE RUMORS SUGGEST, "NOBLE KING".
TRANSFORMATIVE ELECTRON MANIPULATION. SWEET. BET THAT TAKES DOWN JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING, DOESN'T IT?
TROUBLE IS, I'M AN OMEGA-LEVEL ENERGY MANIPULATOR MYSELF, WHICH MEANS--


--UHHNKKK!


MUTE FREAK!

ZWOOSHH
URRAAAH
UGHHH!
SO WHY AREN'T YOU USING THAT FAMOUS VOICE ON ME?
IS THERE SOMETHING IN HERE THAT YOU'RE AFRAID OF DAMAGING?
OR SETTING OFF?

THIS CRAFT IS SOME KIND OF SUPER-WEAPON... ISN'T IT?!
YOU INTEND TO BLOW THE SHI'AR OFF THE MAP! AND I THOUGHT I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE THE DANGEROUS ONE!
YOU ACT SO NOBLE, BUT YOU'RE A GENOCIDAL MONSTER!
AND I AM NOT GOING TO LET YOU DO THIS!
THIRTY-SIX PERCEN
THIRTY-EIGHT PERCEN
DETONATION THRESHOLD IN FOUR MINUTES...
WARNING... ENERGY INSTABILITIES DETECTED...

ATTILAN.

I, MEANWHILE, WAS STILL ABOARD ATTILAN WITH ROYAL FAMILY...

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN, "*INSTABILITIES*"?

MAXIMUS, WHAT DOES THAT *MEAN?*

I'M NOT SURE, CRYSTAL.

MY BROTHER AND THE VULCAN MANIAC ARE *REALLY* GOING AT IT. THE MECHANISM OF THE T-BOMB IS VERY *FRAGILE*. IT'S BARELY *COPING* WITH THE ENERGIES THEY'RE UNLEASHING AT EACH OTHER.

THERE IS A DANGER THE ENERGIES MIGHT SET OFF THE BOMB *PREMATURELY*.

GREAT RANDAC...

YOU'RE QUESTIONING BLACK BOLT'S WISDOM... KREE?

I PUT MY *TRUST* IN HIM... *INHUMAN!* I PUT THE FATE OF MY *SPECIES* IN HIS HANDS!

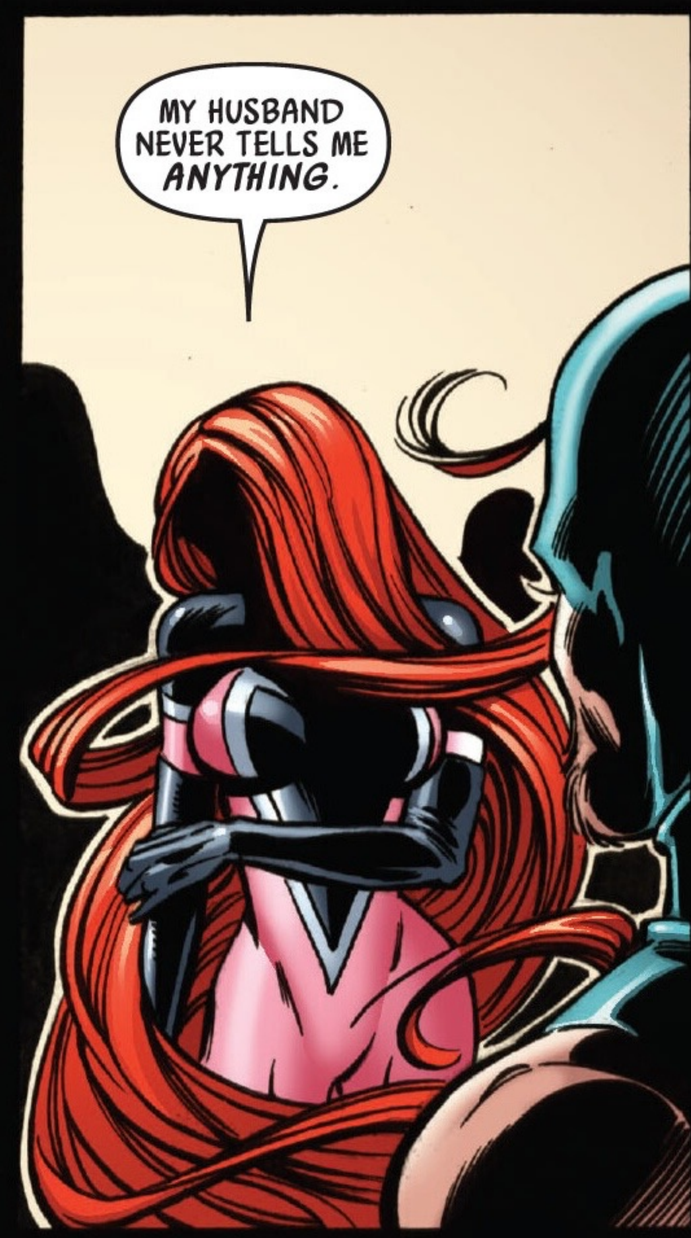
HE'S GOING TO *KILL* HIMSELF? MY HUSBAND'S INTENDING TO DIE, AND YOU DIDN'T BOTHER TO *TELL* ME?

I THOUGHT YOU *UNDERSTOOD*, MY QUEEN! YOU *KNEW* THE PLAN! I THOUGHT IT WAS *OBVIOUS!*

NOT EVERYBODY SEES THINGS AS CLEARLY AS *YOU*, KARNAK! *YOU SHOULD HAVE TOLD ME!*

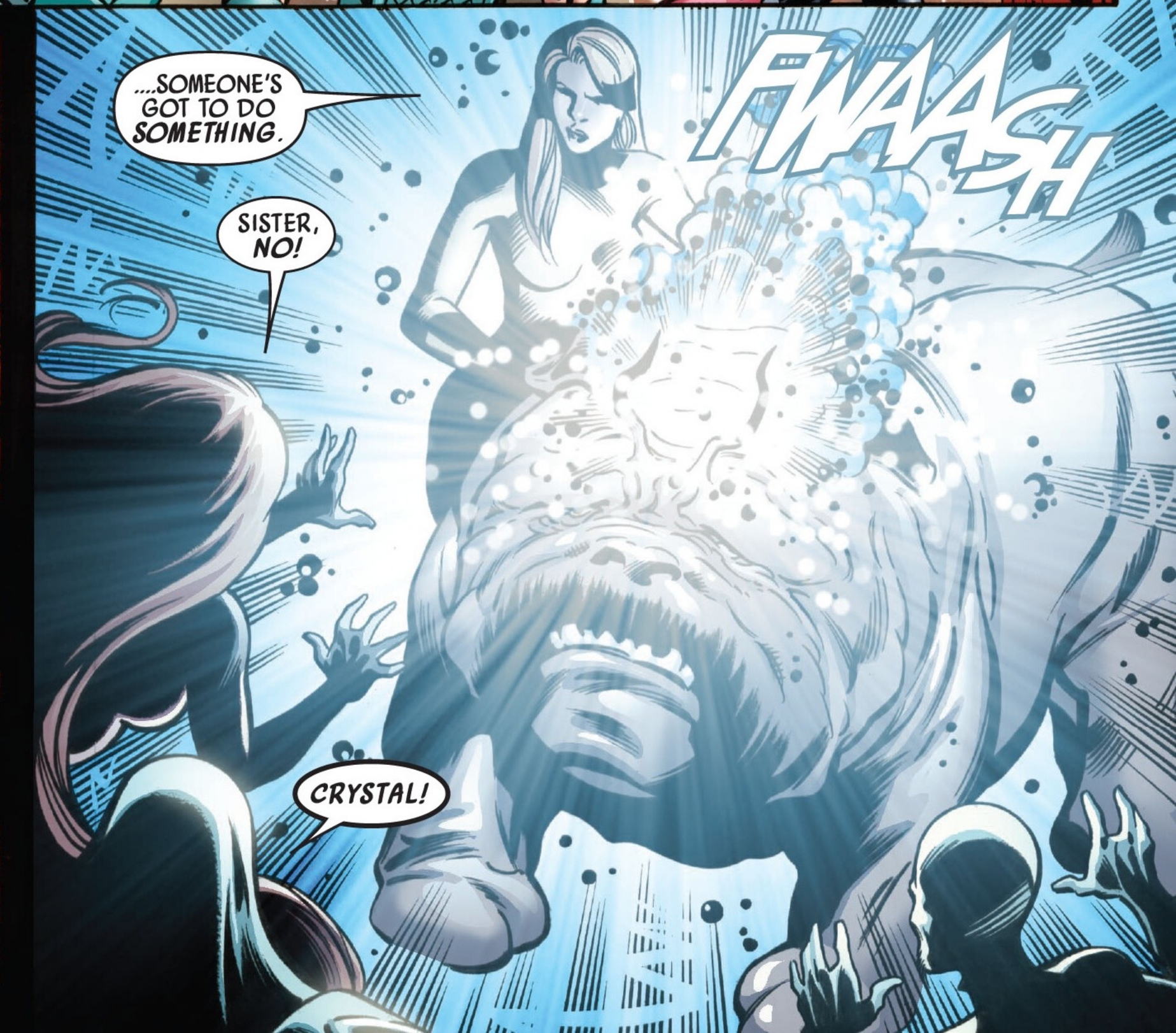
UGHNN! I BELIEVE THE *REAL* QUESTION, MEDUSA...

...IS WHY DIDN'T YOUR HUSBAND TELL YOU?


MY HUSBAND NEVER TELLS ME ANYTHING.

MY QUEEN, WE MUST STOP THIS NOW.
THE T-BOMB IS A MISTAKE AND WE--
NO, ACCUSER. I CANNOT IMAGINE LIFE WITHOUT HIM. BUT THE T-BOMB IS MY HUSBAND'S PLAN.
UNIVERSAL UPLIFT--ENDING RACIAL PREJUDICE BY ELEVATING ALL LIFE-FORMS INTO THE INHUMAN PHYSICAL STATE--IS HIS VISION. THE PEACE IT WILL BRING IS HIS GREATEST HOPE.
BUT HE'S GOING TO KILL HIMS--
NO ONE.
THIS IS WHAT HE LIVED FOR. NO ONE WILL BE PERMITTED TO INTERFERE WITH BLACK BOLT'S PLAN.

THESE ARE THE HARD CHOICES RULERS MUST MAKE.
THESE ARE THE SACRIFICES AND DUTIES THAT COME WITH ROYAL BIRTH.
OH, FOR GOD'S SAKE...


...SOMEONE'S GOT TO DO SOMETHING.
SISTER, NO!
FWAASH
CRYSTAL!

CHANDILAR.
SHI'AR THRONEWORLD.

IT'S *OVER*, LORNA...

...THE IMPERIUM'S *DONE*. THE WOUNDS IT'S TAKEN TONIGHT WILL TAKE *YEARS* TO HEAL.

OH GOD, ALEX. I *NEVER* THOUGHT IT WOULD END LIKE THIS. NOT IN MY WORST *NIGHTMARES*.

IF VULCAN--

NOT VULCAN.

EVEN IF THAT MONSTER'S STILL *ALIVE* SOMEWHERE OUT THERE, HE HASN'T GOT THE STRENGTH TO SAVE *THIS*.

LILANDRA... LILANDRA *MIGHT* HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO IT. BUT NOT MY BROTHER.

NOT *ANYONE* NOW, I THINK.

I'VE SIGNALLED CH'OD. HE'S BRINGING THE STARJAMMER IN. IT'S TIME TO GO, LORNA...

"...IT'S TIME TO WALK AWAY...
"...WHILE WE STILL CAN."

HELP! HELP US!

HELP US! PLEASE, GLADIATOR!
PLEASE!
PLEASE, SIR!
HE IS NOT GLADIATOR! LOOK! HE BEARS THE IMPERIAL SCEPTER!

MAJESTOR!
MAJESTOR!
PLEASE!

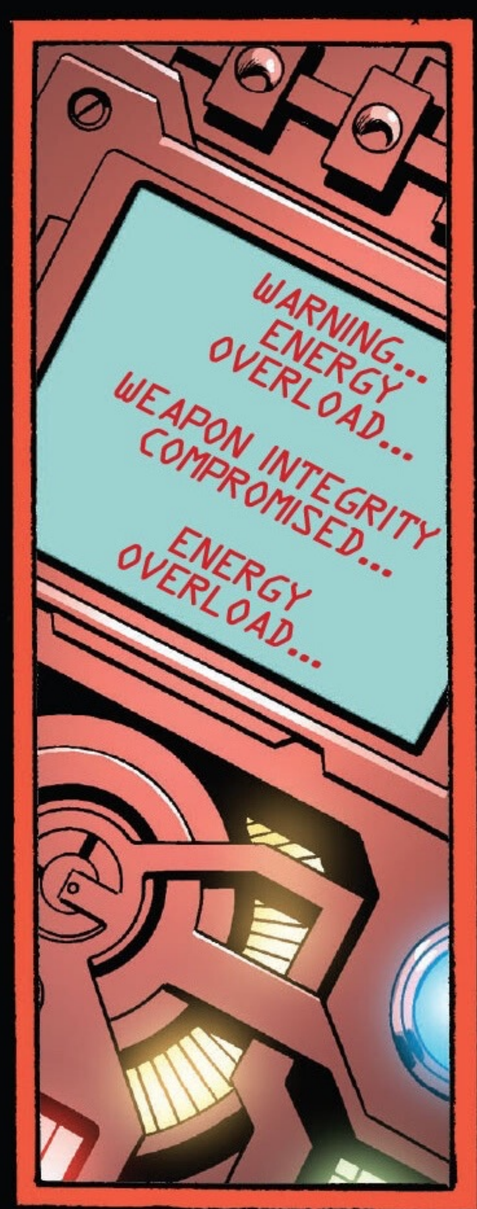
MAJESTOR!

SIXTY-NINE PERCENT. DETONATION THRESHOLD IN TWO MINUTES...
WARNING... ENERGY INSTABILITIES DETECTED...WEAPON INTEGRITY COMPROMISED...
YOU THINK I'M GOING TO JUST LAY DOWN AND LET YOU DETONATE THIS OBSCENITY IN SHI'AR SPACE?
I CAME HERE TO FACE YOU. TO KILL YOU.
SINGLE COMBAT. KING VERSUS KING.
BUT YOU'VE TURNED IT INTO SO MUCH MORE.
I'M SHUTTING THIS THING DOWN.
YOU'RE BEATEN AND YOUR DOOMSDAY WEAPON IS FINISHED.

NHHHH!
I SAID...
...YOU'RE BEATEN. I WIN.

WARNING... ENERGY OVERLOAD... WEAPON INTEGRITY COMPROMISED... ENERGY OVERLOAD...

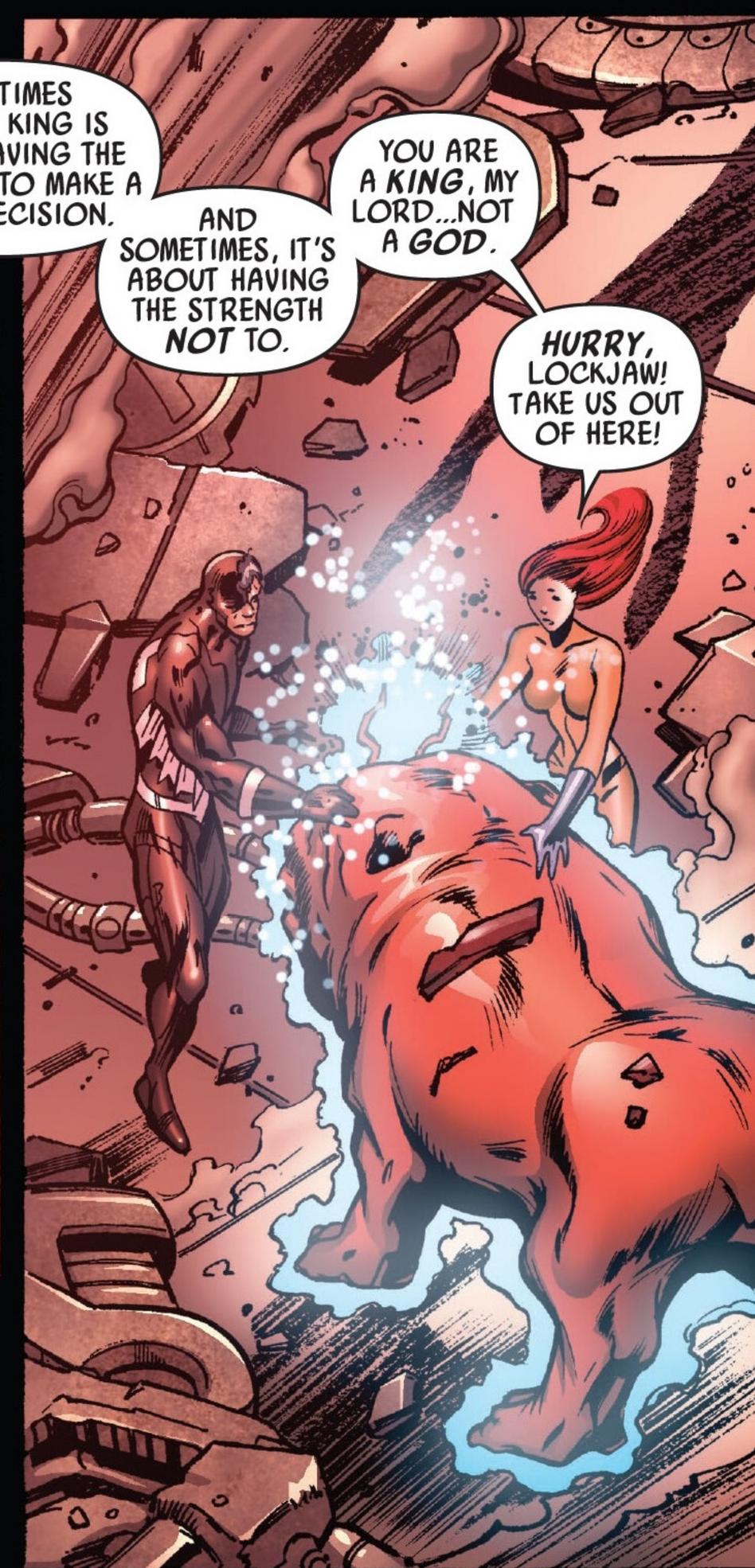
MY LORD, I'M SORRY. I HAD LOCKJAW CARRY ME ABOARD.
I KNOW YOUR CAUSE IS ULTIMATELY NOBLE, BUT I CAN'T LET YOU DO THIS.
FZZMMM
IT'S DONE. I'VE RENDERED THE TERRIGEN CRYSTALS INERT WITH MY ELEMENTAL POWERS.
THIS IS NO LONGER A FUNCTIONAL UPLIFT DEVICE. THE ACTIVE PAYLOAD IS NEUTRALIZED.
IT IS, HOWEVER, STILL A BOMB... AND WE SHOULD LEAVE.
PLEASE. THERE'S NOTHING MORE YOU CAN DO.


WARNING... ENERGY OVERLOAD...
WEAPON INTEGRITY COMPROMISED...
ENERGY OVERLOAD...

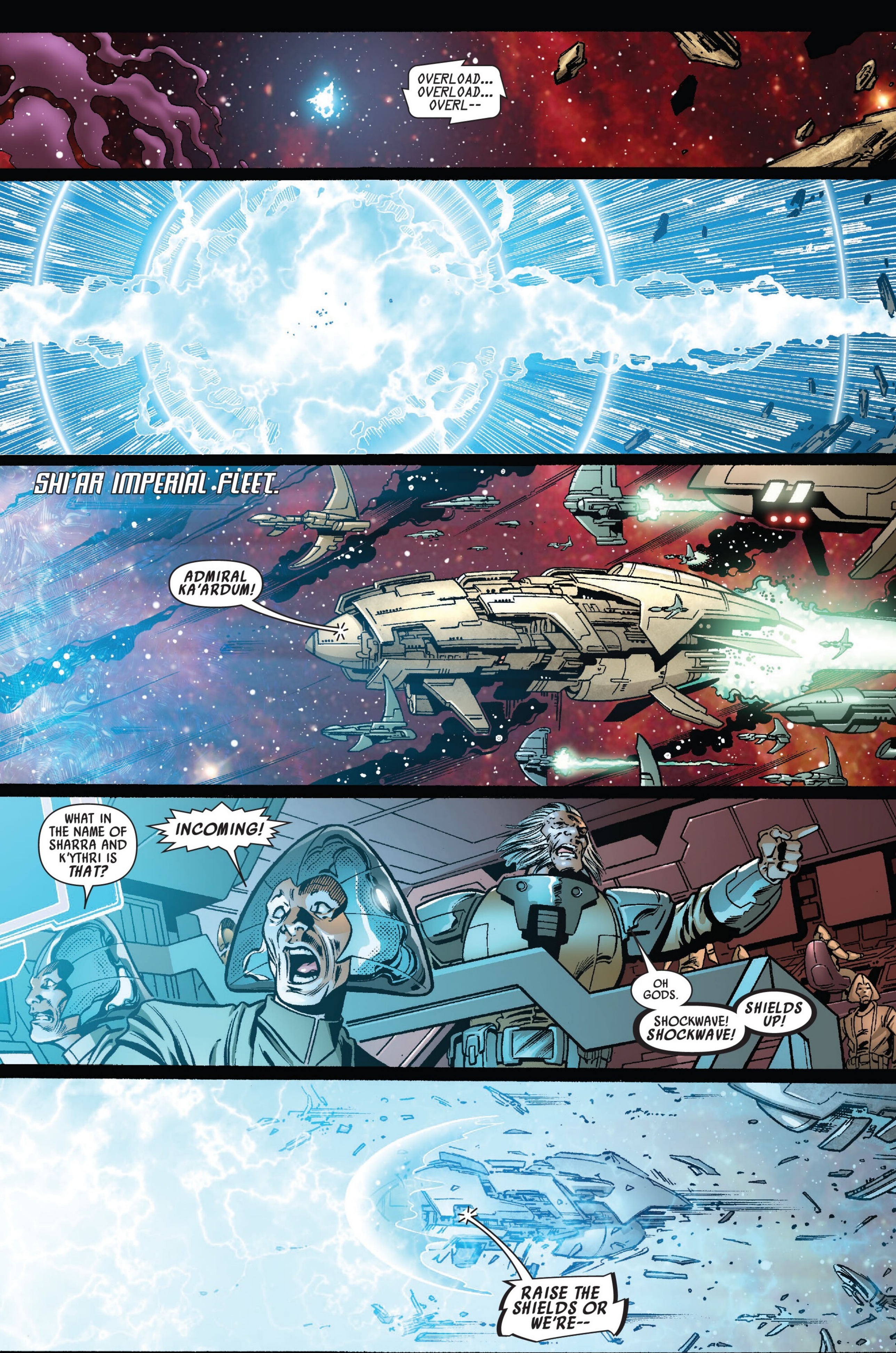
WE MUST LET THIS WEAPON DETONATE HARMLESSLY IN THE EMPTY GULF BETWEEN KREE AND SHI'AR TERRITORIES.

TRANSFORMING ALL SPECIES AGAINST THEIR WILL WOULD NOT HAVE RESULTED IN PEACE.
CAN'T YOU SEE THAT?
WE DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT. IT'S A TYRANNY COMPARABLE TO VULCAN'S AGGRESSION.

OVERLOAD IMMINENT... OVERLOAD IMMINENT...


SOMETIMES BEING A KING IS ABOUT HAVING THE STRENGTH TO MAKE A HARD DECISION.
AND SOMETIMES, IT'S ABOUT HAVING THE STRENGTH NOT TO.
YOU ARE A KING, MY LORD...NOT A GOD.
HURRY, LOCKJAW! TAKE US OUT OF HERE!

RRAAAAAAGHHH!
BLACK BOLT! BLACK BOLT!
OVERLOAD... OVERLOAD...
OMEGA-LEVEL! OMEGA-LEVEL!
GNNHH!
YOU CAN'T KILL ME! I JUST REBUILD MYSELF!
OVERLOAD... OVERLOAD...
YOU KNOW WHAT I THINK I'LL DO? I THINK I'M GOING TO TURN THIS WEAPON AROUND AND SEND IT BACK TO ATTILAN.
IMAGINE THIS BABY GOING OFF IN YOUR FRONT YARD!
IMAGINE YOUR PRECIOUS FAMILY INCINERATED IN THE BLAST-SHOCK!
WHAT HAVE YOU GOT TO SAY TO THAT?
OVERLOAD... OVERLOAD...


OVERLOAD... OVERLOAD... OVERL--
SHI'AR IMPERIAL FLEET.
ADMIRAL KA'ARDUM!
WHAT IN THE NAME OF SHARRA AND K'YTHRI IS THAT?
INCOMING!
OH GODS.
SHOCKWAVE! SHOCKWAVE!
SHIELDS UP!
RAISE THE SHIELDS OR WE'RE--

ATTILAN.

PROTECTOR GRID TO FULL POWER! STABILIZERS!

HOLY *PAMA!*

COMPENSATORS AT *MAXIMUM* THRESHOLD!

BUT WHAT *IS* IT? BY RANDAC, IS IT THE *T-BOMB?*

WE'RE RIDING IT OUT! THE GRID'S *HOLDING!*

YES, THE T-BOMB HAS DETONATED. IT...

IT'S BLOWN A *HOLE...*

A HOLE IN *WHAT?*

IN SPACE AND TIME.

MAXIMUS?

I'M *TELLING* YOU, KARNAK--IT'S BLOWN A HOLE IN THE *FABRIC OF SPACE AND TIME!* THE HOLE'S *PARSECS* ACROSS!

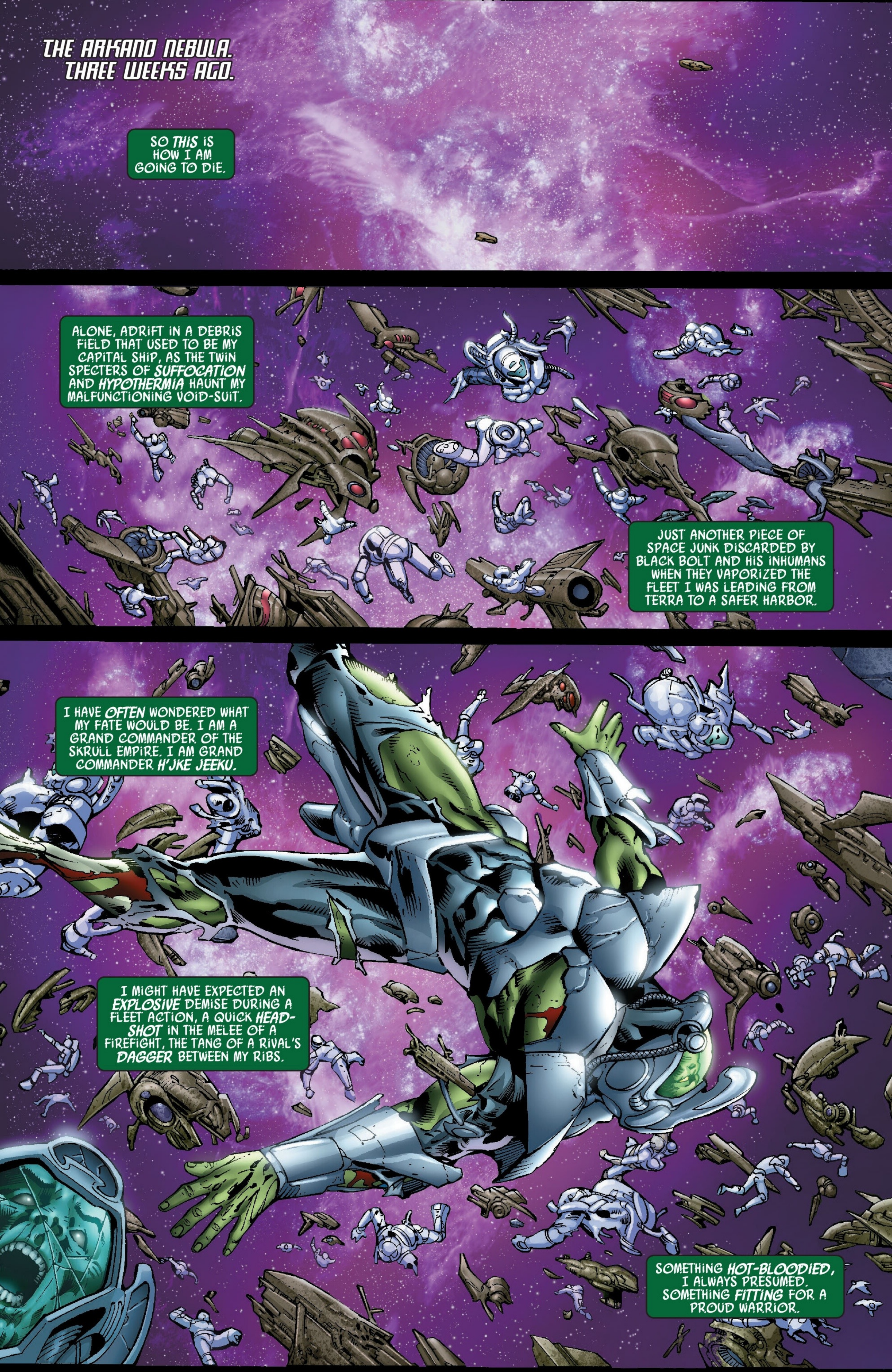
IT WILL BE ALL RIGHT.

CRYSTAL WENT TO GET HIM. SHE WENT TO GET HIM.

MY QUEEN, AN URGENT COMMUNICATION!
IS IT FROM HIM? DID LOCKJAW CARRY HIM CLEAR?
MILADY...? THIS IS NOT FROM LORD BLACK BOLT. IT--
IT'S A SIGNAL FROM THE SHI'AR ADMIRAL KA'ARDUM. HIS FLAGSHIP IS CRIPPLED, ADRIFT. HE REPORTS THAT THE IMPERIAL WARFLEET HAS SUSTAINED...EIGHTY-SEVEN PERCENT LOSSES.
HE'S SUING FOR AN IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE.
MY QUEEN, THE SHI'AR ARE SURRENDERING TO US UNCONDITIONALLY.
WELL.
GOOD.
INCOMING TELEPORT!
IT'S LOCKJAW!
CRYSTAL! THANK THE STARS!
CRYSTAL... WHERE IS MY HUSBAND?
I THOUGHT YOU WENT TO GET BLACK BOLT?

HE...HE DEFEATED VULCAN. KILLED HIM, I THOUGHT.
WE WERE BEGINNING TO 'PORT BACK OUT, BUT VULCAN WASN'T DEAD.
HE'D... RE-FORMED SOMEHOW. HE TORE BLACK BOLT AWAY FROM LOCKJAW...
HE...
OH GODS.
OH GODS.
SISTER, WHAT HAVE WE DONE?
WE'VE WON.
END

WAR OF KINGS: ASCENSION 1


THE ARKANO NEBULA. THREE WEEKS AGO.
SO THIS IS HOW I AM GOING TO DIE.
ALONE, ADRIFT IN A DEBRIS FIELD THAT USED TO BE MY CAPITAL SHIP, AS THE TWIN SPECTERS OF SUFFOCATION AND HYPOTHERMIA HAUNT MY MALFUNCTIONING VOID-SUIT.
JUST ANOTHER PIECE OF SPACE JUNK DISCARDED BY BLACK BOLT AND HIS INHUMANS WHEN THEY VAPORIZED THE FLEET I WAS LEADING FROM TERRA TO A SAFER HARBOR.
I HAVE OFTEN WONDERED WHAT MY FATE WOULD BE. I AM A GRAND COMMANDER OF THE SKRULL EMPIRE. I AM GRAND COMMANDER H'JKE JEEKU.
I MIGHT HAVE EXPECTED AN EXPLOSIVE DEMISE DURING A FLEET ACTION, A QUICK HEAD-SHOT IN THE MELEE OF A FIREFIGHT, THE TANG OF A RIVAL'S DAGGER BETWEEN MY RIBS.
SOMETHING HOT-BLOODIED, I ALWAYS PRESUMED. SOMETHING FITTING FOR A PROUD WARRIOR.

I NEVER THOUGHT MY DEATH WOULD TAKE SO LONG.
OR THAT IT WOULD BE SO COLD AND SILENT.
OR THAT THE ONLY WITNESSES WOULD BE TREMBLING STARS AND THE FLASH-FROZEN EYES OF THE DEAD.
MNNH. THE LACK OF AIR IS BEGINNING TO AFFECT MY BRAIN.
THOUGHT I SAW SOMETHING JUST THEN. THAT THE BLACKNESS OF SPACE ITSELF HAD CRACKED OPEN AND SOMETHING HAD COME OUT.
PERHAPS THE WEAPONS THE INHUMANS USED WERE SO POTENT THEY BROKE SPACE ITSELF?
GAH! THE INHUMANS! THEIR STRENGTH MAY BE CONSIDERABLE, THEIR WEAPONS TERRIBLE, BUT THEY ARE NOT WARRIORS!
THEY HAVE NO EXPERIENCE. NO CODE. TRUE WARRIORS WOULD HAVE CIRCLED BACK AND HONORED US WITH A QUICK DEATH IN PLACE OF THIS LINGERING--
AGAIN! IT ISN'T MY DYING BRAIN AT ALL!
SOMETHING IS THERE! SOMETHING IS...COMING!

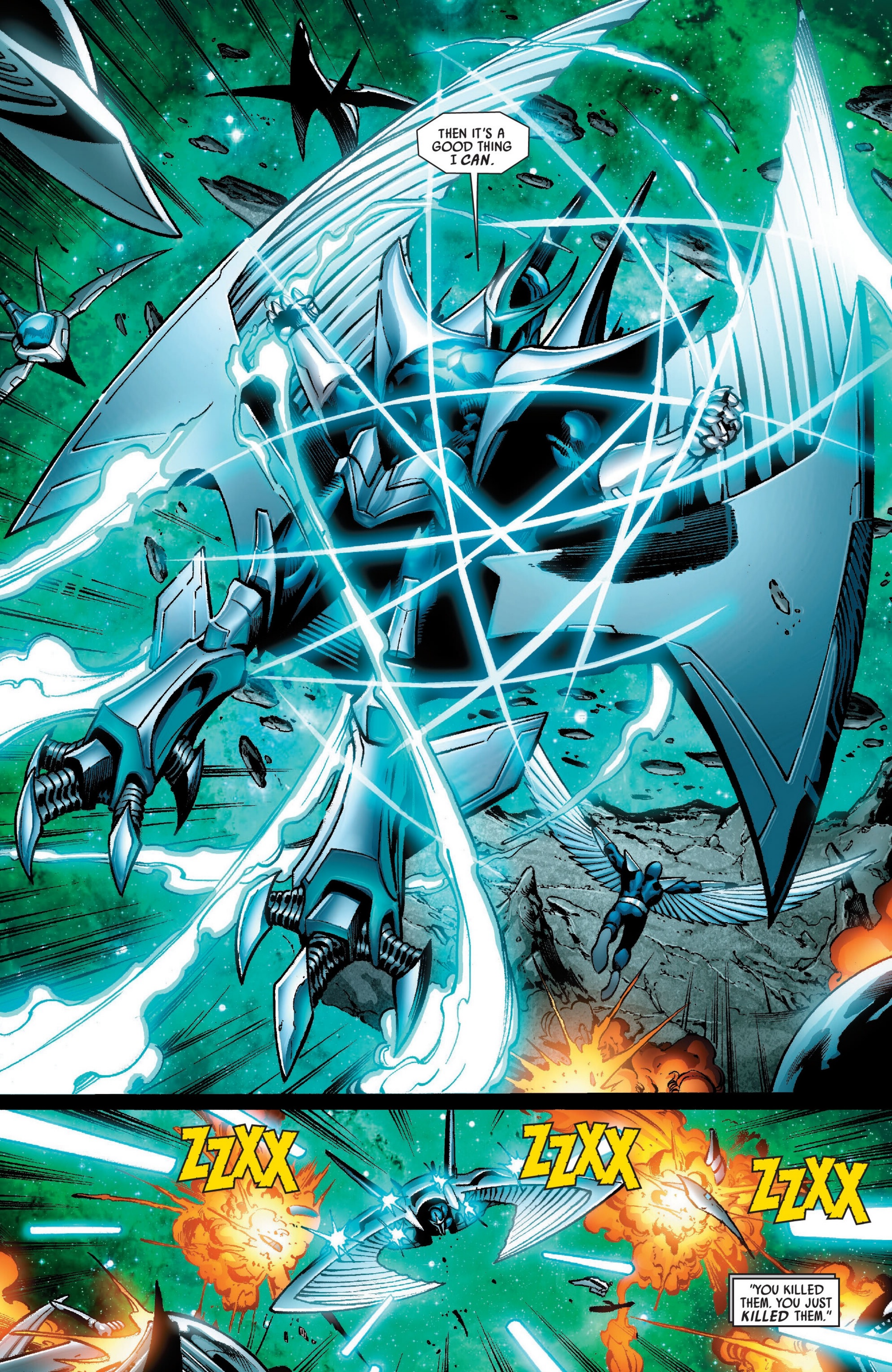
DARK MATTERS
THE SECRET OF THE DARKHAWKS PART ONE

THE NEGATIVE ZONE. THREE WEEKS LATER.
TALON? HEY TALON?!
FORGET MY FUNKY SPACE ARMOR, AND TREAT ME LIKE THE TWENTYSOMETHING FROM NEW YORK I ACTUALLY AM.
I DON'T REALLY KNOW MUCH ABOUT COSMIC BUG-EYED MONSTERS, OKAY?
SO WOULD YOU MIND EXPLAINING...
...WHAT THE HELL DID WE DO TO TICK THESE GUYS OFF?
THE NATURE OF THEIR ANIMUS HARDLY MATTERS, CHRISTOPHER.
FOCUS ON THE FACT THAT IF WE DON'T DEFEAT THEM, THEY WILL SLAY US.

WRONG ANSWER! YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE TEACHING ME STUFF!
THAT WAS THE WHOLE POINT OF THIS COSMIC ROADTRIP--WASN'T IT, OBI WAN? YOU COMING TO EARTH, FINDING ME AND TEACHING ME WHAT A DARKHAWK REALLY IS AND HOW TO BE ONE?
IT'S A COMPLEX AND--
WHY HAVE WE BEEN AMBUSHED BY GIANT CREEPY-CRAWLIES?!
WATCH YOUR TONE.
CHECK YOUR ANGER.
WE'VE SPOKEN ABOUT THIS.
THESE ARE CHITINAUTS OF THE SEVENTH STRIDULATION, AN ELITE THAT SERVES CATASTROPHUS, ONE OF THE LORDS OF ARTHROS WHO HELD THESE TERRITORIES IN FEALTY TO ANNIHILUS HIMSELF.
THEIR ISSUE WITH US IS PRIMARILY TERRITORIAL.
ONCE WE CROSSED THE BLEAKSUN TRACTS WE ENTERED THEIR OUTER FIEFDOMS.
SORRY!
I'M SORRY, TALON.
I GET SO WOUND UP. JUST GIVE ME SOMETHING TO WORK WITH.
RIGHT. IT'S ALLLLL CLEAR NOW.

DID THE INFORMATION NOT HELP?
NO IT DIDN'T! YOU SOUNDED LIKE A PARAGRAPH LIFTED AT RANDOM FROM THE HOBBIT!
=SIGH=
WE'VE TRESPASSED, CHRISTOPHER. WE'RE NOT DISPLAYING A WARRANT OR PERMIT SANCTIONED BY CATASTROPHUS, AND WE HAVE NOT RELEASED THE CORRECT SEMIOCHEMICAL PHEROMONES.
SO...THAT MEANS WE DON'T SMELL RIGHT TO THEM?
WE DON'T EVEN SMELL OF THE RIGHT UNIVERSE. THIS IS THE NEGATIVE ZONE, REMEMBER?

DID YOU... DID YOU JUST SHIELD ME?
I AM NEVER GOING TO FIGURE THESE ☠☠☠☠ OUT!
FZZZMM
FOCUS! CALM YOUR MIND!
ONCE I HAVE TAUGHT YOU HOW TO BOND WITH YOUR RAPTOR ARMOR, EVERYTHING WILL BE CLEAR.
YOU WILL BE ABLE TO HEAR THE DATASONG OF THE NULL SOURCE.
IT WILL GUIDE YOU AND INFORM YOU.
UNTIL THAT DAY COMES, TRY TO CONTROL YOUR ANGER!
I'M TRYING, FOR ☠☠☠☠ SAKE!
YOU ARE NOT TRYING HARD ENOUGH.
I THOUGHT YOU WERE WILLING TO LEARN FROM ME.
NOW, FOR EXAMPLE, WOULD BE A GOOD TIME TO LEARN HOW TO RECONFIGURE.
CHITINAUT TOP COVER IS BEGINNING TO OUTGUN OUR DEFAULT ARMOR CONFIGURATION.
YOU KNOW I CAN'T DO THAT!
I KNOW YOU CAN! YOU DID IT ON EARTH!
YEAH, BUT I DON'T KNOW HOW I DID IT! I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THE SUIT HAD ALL THESE VARIANTS I COULD CALL UP!
RECONFIGURE TO WARFLIGHT MODE NOW. SUMMON NEW ARMOR FROM THE NULL SOUCE!
I'M TELLING YOU I CAN'T!
I JUST CAN'T DO IT!


THEN IT'S A GOOD THING I CAN.
ZZXX
ZZXX
ZZXX
"YOU KILLED THEM. YOU JUST KILLED THEM."

OH, YOU'RE PATHETIC WITH YOUR QUEASY, WRONG-HEADED ETHICS, AND YOUR INABILITY TO PERFORM EVEN THE MOST BASIC RECONFIGURATION, NOT TO MEN--
SHUT UP, TALON! DON'T SAY THAT!
CHRISTOPHER, I MET THEIR LETHAL AGGRESSION WITH AN EQUIVALENT INTENT.
WHAT OTHER RESPONSE COULD THERE BE IN A COMBAT SCENARIO?
I DUNNO... I SWORE I'D NEVER--
KTANG
JUST SHUT UP!
NOT TO MENTION THE ANGER.
DO YOU SEE HOW EASY IT IS TO GOAD YOU?
UNLESS YOU MASTER YOUR ANGER, YOU WILL NEVER BE A TRUE RAPTOR.
ZZKOW
UHNFF!

ONE HOUR LATER...
I WONDER IF RIDER EVER FELT THIS FAR OUT OF HIS DEPTH?

RIDER? YOU ARE REFERRING TO THE HUMAN NOVA CENTURION YOU BEFRIENDED...RICHARD RIDER?
YEP. HE WENT OFF INTO SPACE AND CAME BACK A BIG-TIME HERO. HE REALLY MADE SOMETHING OF HIMSELF.
I SO WANTED AN UPGRADE LIKE THAT!
WHO KNEW IT WOULD BE THIS HARD?

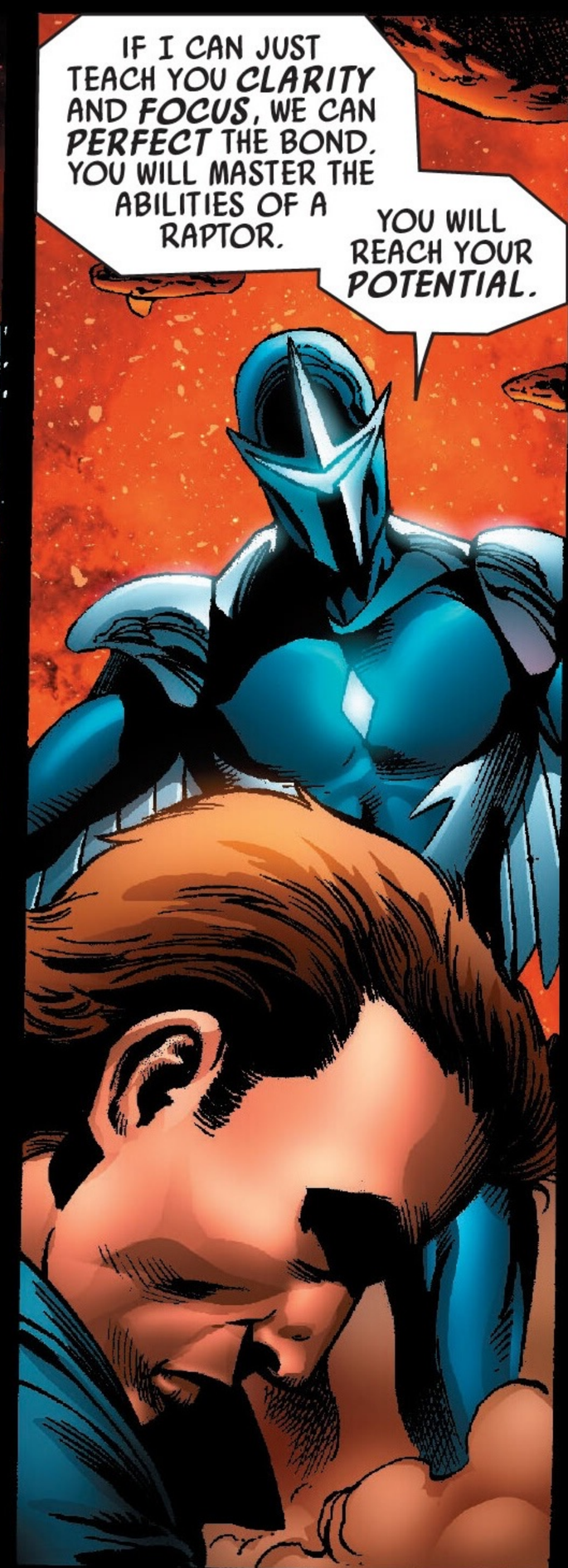
I SHOULD NEVER HAVE COME. I SHOULD HAVE STAYED HOME.
THAT ROBOT HUNTER THAT FOLLOWED YOU TO EARTH REALLY WRECKED MY FAMILY. MY MOM'S HURT. MY BROTHERS REALLY NEED ME.
I WAS JUST SO HELL-BENT ON DOING THIS. SO SELFISH.
I WANTED TO FOLLOW YOU. I WANTED TO BE A BIG-TIME HERO.

THE CENTURIONS OF XANDAR ARE PEACEKEEPERS. THEY ARE MINOR GUARDIANS OF ORDER...AT BEST.
YOU ARE A RAPTOR. YOU ARE PART OF A TRADITION THAT PREDATES THE NOVA CORPS.
YOU ARE SOMETHING FAR MORE PRECIOUS THAN A SIMPLE GUARDIAN OF ORDER.
YOU ARE A CATALYST. YOU ARE AN ARCHITECT OF FATE.

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN, TALON?
WHY CAN'T YOU TELL ME ANYTHING SOLID?

THE PROCESS HAS TO WORK THIS WAY, CHRISTOPHER. I AM TRYING TO CLEAR YOUR HEAD, NOT CONFUSE IT.

NO MATTER WHAT YOU'VE BEEN TOLD BEFORE, YOU MUST UNDERSTAND THAT THE ARMOR YOU WEAR AS DARKHAWK WAS FORGED EONS BEFORE THE HUMAN RACE HAD ARISEN. IT WAS NOT DESIGNED TO FIT A HUMAN BEING.
AS A CONSEQUENCE, YOU HAVE NEVER COMPLETELY BONDED WITH IT.
YOU HAVE NEVER UNLOCKED ITS SECRETS, NOR HAVE YOU RECEIVED ALL OF ITS GIFTS.
THE ANGER THAT TORMENTS YOU IS A CHRONIC SYMPTOM OF THE INCOMPATIBILITY BETWEEN YOUR MIND AND THE ARMOR.


IF I CAN JUST TEACH YOU CLARITY AND FOCUS, WE CAN PERFECT THE BOND. YOU WILL MASTER THE ABILITIES OF A RAPTOR.
YOU WILL REACH YOUR POTENTIAL.

YOU WILL HEAR THE DATA-SONG OF THE NULL SOURCE.
I'D LIKE THAT.
IT IS DESIRABLE.
IN AGES PAST, THERE WERE MANY RAPTORS WATCHING OVER THE UNIVERSE.

WHEN I AWOKE AFTER MILLENNIA SPENT IN DORMANCY, I FOUND YOU WERE THE ONLY ONE LEFT.
A POOR, DAMAGED RAPTOR, ONLY HALF-BONDED TO THE ORGANISM THAT HAD INHERITED ITS AMULET.
BUT EVEN A DAMAGED RAPTOR IS TOO PRECIOUS TO CAST ASIDE.
I AM EAGER TO TRAIN YOU BECAUSE I NEED YOU.
THE WAR BETWEEN THE KINGS MUST BE CONTROLLED, AND I CANNOT DO IT ALONE.

YOU SHOULD RETURN TO ARMORED FORM, CHRISTOPHER.
YOUR HUMAN BODY OUGHT NOT TO BE EXPOSED TO THE ENERGIES OF THE NEGATIVE ZONE FOR TOO LONG.
YEAH, DON'T WANT TO TURN INTO A GIANT BUG.

YOU HAVE MASTERED SOME SKILLS.
YOU SEEM TO HAVE NO DIFFICULTY WITH THE DEFAULT RECONFIGURATION.
I GUESS. BUT THE IDEA THERE'S A WHOLE WARDROBE OF ARMOR VARIANTS WAITING FOR ME IN NULL-SPACE...?
AND I CAN JUST SWITCH THEM AT WILL?
I JUST...
FOCUS.
REMEMBER WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO CHANGE FROM CHRISTOPHER POWELL INTO DARKHAWK.
IT SHOULD BE NO MORE DEMANDING THAN THAT.
YOUR ANGER IS JUST GETTING IN THE WAY.
BECAUSE I'M A HUMAN BEING AND I SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN GIVEN THIS SUIT IN THE FIRST PLACE.
IT DOESN'T FIT ME.
WE'LL MAKE IT FIT.
NOW LET'S MOVE. THE REASON WE CAME TO THE NEGATIVE ZONE IS ABOUT TO RISE IN THE WESTERN SKY...
IT IS CALLD HETEROPTERON.
IT IS THE MIGHTIEST OF LORD CATASTROPHUS'S NOMAD FORTRESSES.
YOU KNOW YOU'RE STILL SOUNDING LIKE GANDOLF, RIGHT?

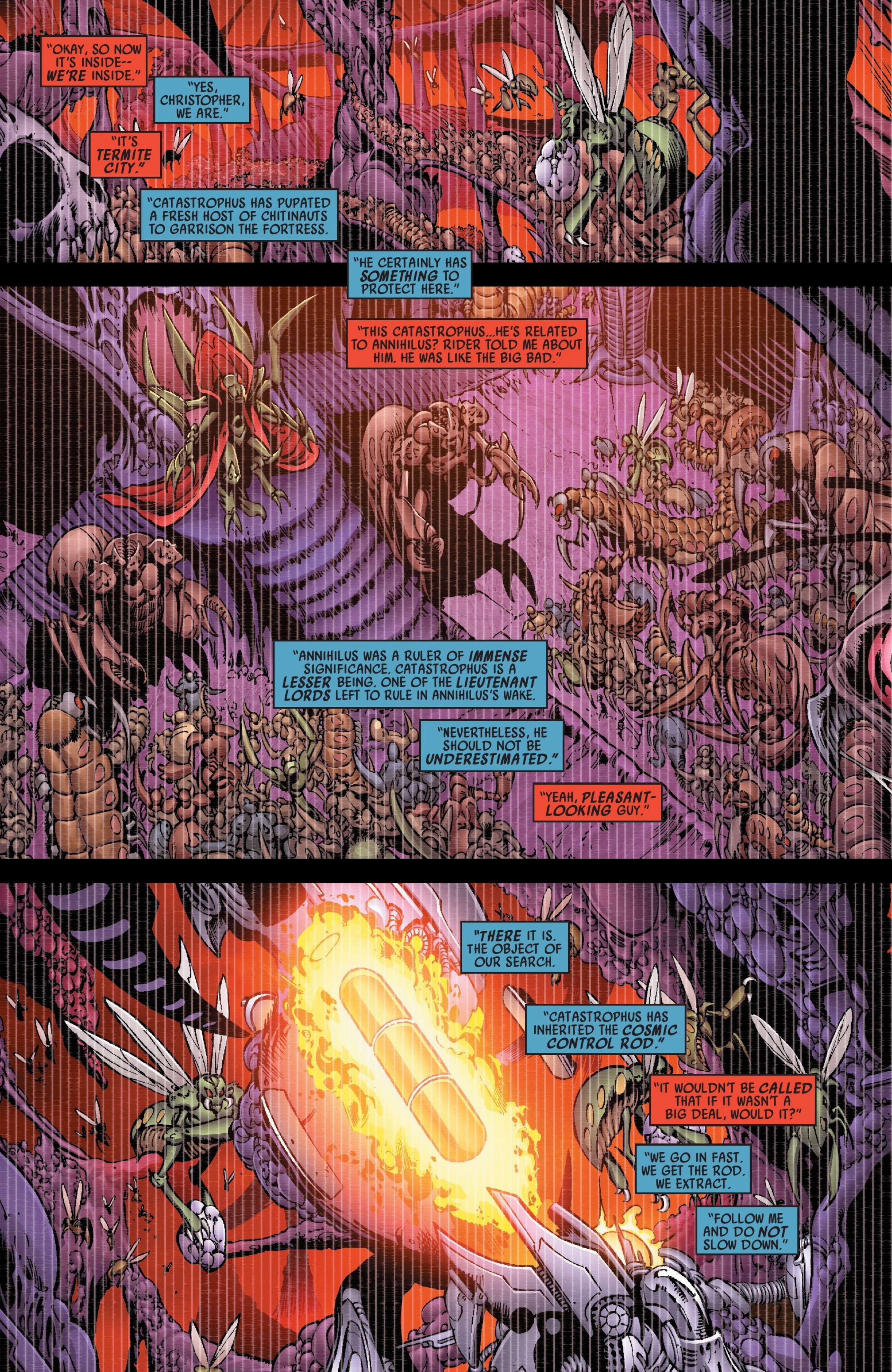
SO WE'RE ON SOME KIND OF *MISSION*, THEN?
A MISSION OF GRAVITY AND CONSEQUENCE.
IF WE'RE GOING TO SHAPE THE COURSE OF THE COMING WAR BETWEEN THE KREE AND THE SHI'AR, WE NEED TO BE ABLE TO AFFECT THE *BALANCE* OF POWER.

A RAPTOR IS A *FORMIDABLE* BEING, CHRISTOPHER, BUT IT IS WITH *INSIGHT* AND *GUILE* RATHER THAN *MUSCLES* AND *CLAWS* THAT IT SCULPTS HISTORY.
WE MUST SCOUT THE FORTRESS.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH YOUR CLAW-CABLE?

OKAY, I DIDN'T KNOW WE COULD DO *THAT* EITHER.

HUSH. I'M CUEING YOUR RECEPTORS TO RECEIVE THE SCOUT-FEED.
HEY. *HEY!* I CAN SEE THROUGH ITS EYES!
OF *COURSE* YOU CAN.


"OKAY, SO NOW IT'S INSIDE-- WE'RE INSIDE."
"YES, CHRISTOPHER, WE ARE."
"IT'S TERMITE CITY."
"CATASTROPHUS HAS PUPATED A FRESH HOST OF CHITINAUTS TO GARRISON THE FORTRESS.
"HE CERTAINLY HAS SOMETHING TO PROTECT HERE."
"THIS CATASTROPHUS...HE'S RELATED TO ANNIHILUS? RIDER TOLD ME ABOUT HIM. HE WAS LIKE THE BIG BAD."
"ANNIHILUS WAS A RULER OF IMMENSE SIGNIFICANCE. CATASTROPHUS IS A LESSER BEING, ONE OF THE LIEUTENANT LORDS LEFT TO RULE IN ANNIHILUS'S WAKE.
"NEVERTHELESS, HE SHOULD NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED."
"YEAH, PLEASANT-LOOKING GUY."
"THERE IT IS. THE OBJECT OF OUR SEARCH.
"CATASTROPHUS HAS INHERITED THE COSMIC CONTROL ROD."
"IT WOULDN'T BE CALLED THAT IF IT WASN'T A BIG DEAL, WOULD IT?"
"WE GO IN FAST. WE GET THE ROD. WE EXTRACT.
"FOLLOW ME AND DO NOT SLOW DOWN."

TEN MINUTES LATER...
☠☠☠☠! THIS IS NOT GOOD!
KEEP FOCUS! WATCH THAT ANGER!
I DON'T HAVE TIME TO WATCH MY ANGER! THERE'S TOO MANY OF THESE FREAKS!
TALON?
TALON, WHERE DID YOU GO? I NEED A HAND HERE!
UGHNN! TALON?!
CHRIS! I'M CORNERED! I NEED YOUR HELP!
CHRIS! QUICKLY! WE NEED TO RECONFIGURE TO FULL COMBAT MODE!
☠☠☠☠! YOU KNOW I CAN'T--

CHRIS! CHRIS! FORGET YOUR ANGER! REMEMBER WHAT I SAID! OPEN YOUR MIND!
DARKHAWK! YOU MUST DO IT!
☠☠☠☠!
NHHH!
SZZFASH

ZZZDOOM
ZZZDOOM
ZZZDOOM

OH MAN.
OH MAN.

YOU SEE, CHRISTOPHER? YOU SEE WHAT YOU ARE CAPABLE OF?
YOU--
YOU *MADE* ME DO THAT? YOU MADE ME *KILL* THEM!
BEFORE WE'RE DONE, YOU'LL BE WADING THROUGH THE BLOOD OF *THOUSANDS.*

YOU'VE FINALLY *BONDED*, CHRISTOPHER. *FULL* COMPATIBILITY HAS BEEN ACHIEVED.
YOU ARE FULLY CONNECTED TO THE NULL SOURCE, AND *ALL* THE SECRETS ARE OPEN TO YOU.
WHAT THE ☠☠☠☠ ARE YOU...?

OH MY GOD.
I'M SEEING VISIONS OF KIDNAPPINGS... ASSASSINATIONS...
WE'RE--
WE'RE THE *BAD* GUYS?

RRRAAAA!
DON'T BE UNDONE BY YOUR OWN MIND.
KRAKK
FZAAP
SHUT UP! SHUT UP!
FZAAP
FZAAP

AND I THOUGHT WE WERE FRIENDS, CHRISTOPHER.
THUKK
I WON'T LET YOU DO THIS TO ME! YOU TRICKED ME!
FZAAP
ZZAMM
YOU NO LONGER MATTER.
CHKK

YOU ARE JUST AN ABERRATION! A PARASITE THAT MUST BE CLEANED OUT OF THE RAPTOR ARMOR.
I JUST NEEDED TO GET YOUR HUMAN MIND TO LOOSEN ITS MORONIC GRIP ON THE AMULET SO I COULD EXPUNGE YOU FROM IT.
WHAT?!
GO! LEAVE! DEPART!
FOREVER!
EAAARGGHHHH!
BROTHER RAPTOR? CAN YOU HEAR ME?
SPEAK IF YOU CAN...

IT HAS BEEN SO LONG.
I HAVE ACHED IN THE DARKNESS, TALON.
THE HUMAN ABOMINATION? IS IT STILL INSIDE YOU?
NO. IT'S GONE. FLUSHED OUT AND CAST AWAY.
NOW THERE IS ONLY RAZOR.
THEN WELCOME BACK TO LIFE, OLD FRIEND.
WE HAVE MUCH WORK TO DO.

WAR OF KINGS: ASCENSION 2

THE NOMAD FORTRESS OF HETEROPTERON, THE NEGATIVE ZONE.
SHALL WE?
IT'S BEEN A WHILE.
I HAVE SLEPT IN THE NULL TOO LONG, TALON. THE OTHERS?
SIXTY-ONE CENTURIES SINCE YOU WERE LAST ACTIVE AS A RAPTOR, RAZOR.
THERE ARE NO OTHERS. WE ARE THE ONLY MEMBERS OF THE FRATERNITY OF RAPTORS ACTIVE IN THIS PITIFUL AGE.

THEN WHAT OF THE GREAT PURPOSE?
IT ENDURES. IT HAS LOST FOCUS AND DIRECTION WITHOUT THE FRATERNITY TO GUIDE IT AND SHAPE IT, BUT IT STILL EXISTS.
WE HAVE MUCH WORK TO DO IF WE ARE TO SET IT BACK ON THE RIGHT PATH.
THE RIGHT PATH IS ALL THAT MATTERS.
THIS PLACE SMELLS LIKE THE NEGATIVE ZONE. WHY HAVE YOU WOKEN ME HERE?
NECESSITY, RAZOR.
THESE CHITINAUTS ARE GUARDING A PRIZE THAT WILL AFFORD US CONSIDERABLE LEVERAGE IN THE WORK AHEAD.

I KNOW NOTHING OF THESE THINGS, TALON. I CANNOT HEAR THE NULL SOURCE'S DATASONG *CLEARLY* YET.
THIS ARMOR IS STILL CLOGGED WITH THE RESIDUE OF THE *ANOMALY* THAT WAS INHABITING IT.
A HUMAN. IT WAS CALLED A *HUMAN*. THEY ARE A WRETCHED *INFANT* RACE WHICH HAS REACHED THE STARS SINCE WE WERE LAST AWAKE.
YOUR ARMOR SYSTEMS WILL PURGE ITS TAINT SOON.
KBOOM
FOR NOW, *TRUST* ME. I CAN HEAR THE DATASONG *PERFECTLY*. THIS IS OUR *OBJECTIVE*.
CATASTROPHUS. HE IS A MINOR LORD OF THE ZONE...

HEATHEN AVI-FORMS! CATASTROPHUS WILL DEVOUR YOUR ENTRAILS AND LAY EGGS INSIDE YOUR SKULLS!
NULL AND VOID

CATASTROPHUS WILL HEAP SUFFERING UPON YOU FOR--

ULLKK!

SHWUKK

UKK... GHHHK... KHHHG...

THE INSECT KINGS OF THE ZONE USED TO BE *SO* FORMIDABLE.

COME. THE PRIZE.

THE *COSMIC CONTROL ROD*. A *RARE* WONDER INDEED.

IF THAT FOOL HAD USED IT AGAINST US, HE *MIGHT* HAVE STOOD A CHANCE.

WHY DID HE FACE US *WITHOUT* ITS POWER?

BECAUSE HE WAS USING IT TO PROTECT HIMSELF IN A *DIFFERENT* WAY, RAZOR.

THIS IS A PUPATION CHAMBER. THE ***ROYAL NURSERY.***

THE CONTROL ROD IS BEING USED TO RETARD THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS ***INFANT.***

WHAT IS IT?

NOTHING. A WHELP.

BUT IF ALLOWED TO GROW, IT WOULD BECOME A THING CALLED ***ANNIHILUS.***

IT WAS CATASTROPHUS'S DUTY TO RULE UNTIL ANNIHILUS WAS MATURE, BUT PERMANENTLY STUNTING HIS GROWTH LIKE THIS, CATASTROPHUS WAS ENSURING HIMSELF A ***LONG*** REIGN.

SHALL I KILL IT?

NO. ANNIHILUS IS TOO ***INTERESTING*** A VARIABLE TO BE REMOVED FROM THE BOARD.

TAKE THE ROD AND LET HIM GROW AGAIN.

ONE DAY, HE MAY PROVE ***USEFUL*** TO US.

ANNIHILUS! ***ANNIHILUS!***

REMEMBER THIS MOMENT! SEED IT DEEP IN YOUR STILL-FORMING MIND AS A MEMORY YOU CANNOT DENY!

REMEMBER THE DAY THE ***FRATERNITY OF RAPTORS*** SPARED YOUR LIFE!

DREAM ON, BUT DO NOT ***FORGET!***

TAKE THE ROD. OUR MISSION HERE IS DONE.

RAZOR? DO YOU HEAR ME?

WHAT'S THE MATTER?

A TREMOR, FOR A MOMENT. LIKE SOMETHING ***CRIED OUT*** IN MY MIND...

"...IT IS GONE NOW."

WH-WHERE AM I?

WHERE... WHAT THE [illegible]?!

OH MY GOD OH MY GOD OH MY--

OKAY, IF I'M *NOT* IN THE ARMOR, THEN I MUST HAVE *SWITCHED OUT* TO *NULL-SPACE.*

BUT THIS IS *NOTHING* LIKE NULL-SPACE. I'VE *BEEN* THERE! I'VE *SEEN* IT!

UNLESS... *THAT* WAS ALL FAKE *TOO?*

TALON SAID...HE *CONFESSED...*

THE DARKHAWKS ARE A FORCE OF *EVIL.* I'VE ACCIDENTALLY BECOME PART OF A SOCIETY OF COSMIC... *BAD GUYS.*

THE ARMOR, THE AMULET *ITSELF,* THEY WERE *LYING* TO ME ALL ALONG.

HOLY ☠☠☠☠.

THIS IS *INSANE.*

HELLO?! CAN ANYBODY HELP ME? I NEED SOME HELP!

ANYBODY?!

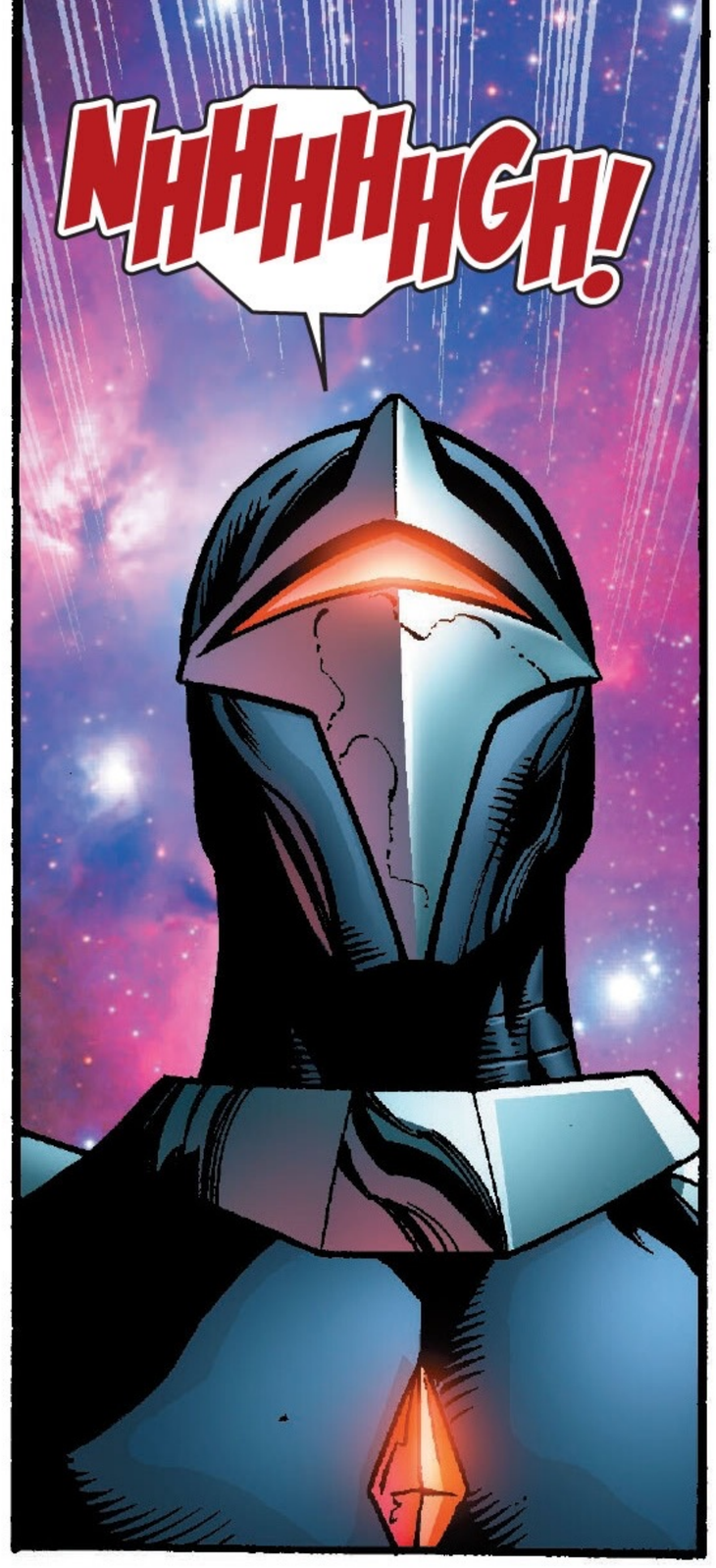
WHUD WHUD

ONE, TWO, THREE...

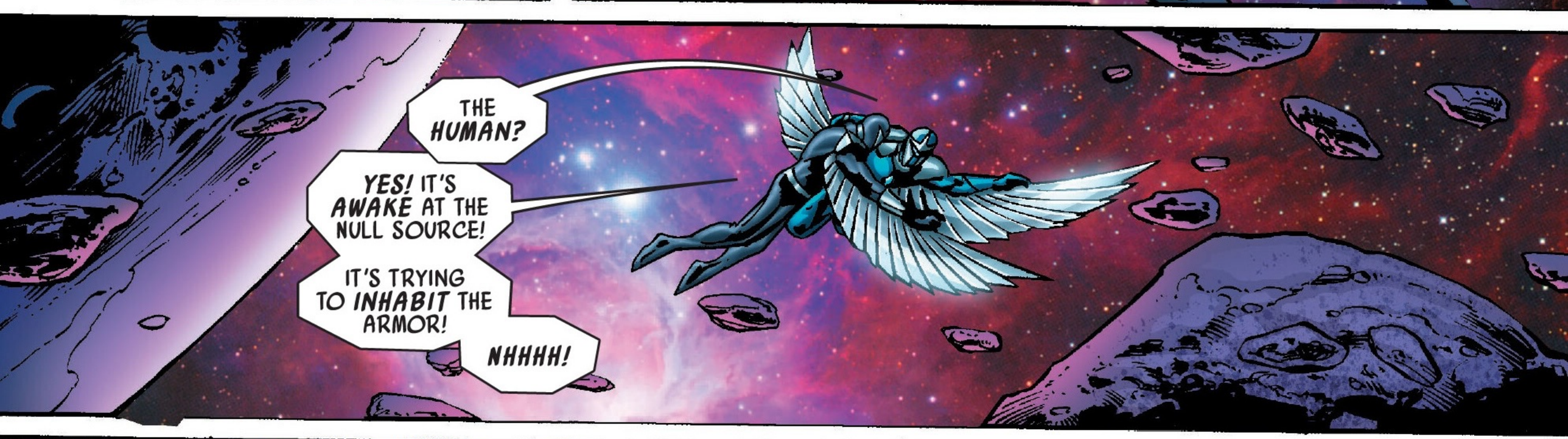
OKAY, OKAY. MAYBE I CAN *RECONFIGURE.* MAYBE I CAN GET OUT OF HERE BY SHIFTING *BACK* INTO THE ARMOR.

COME ON, POWELL. YOU CAN DO IT. YOU SHIFT *ALL* THE TIME...

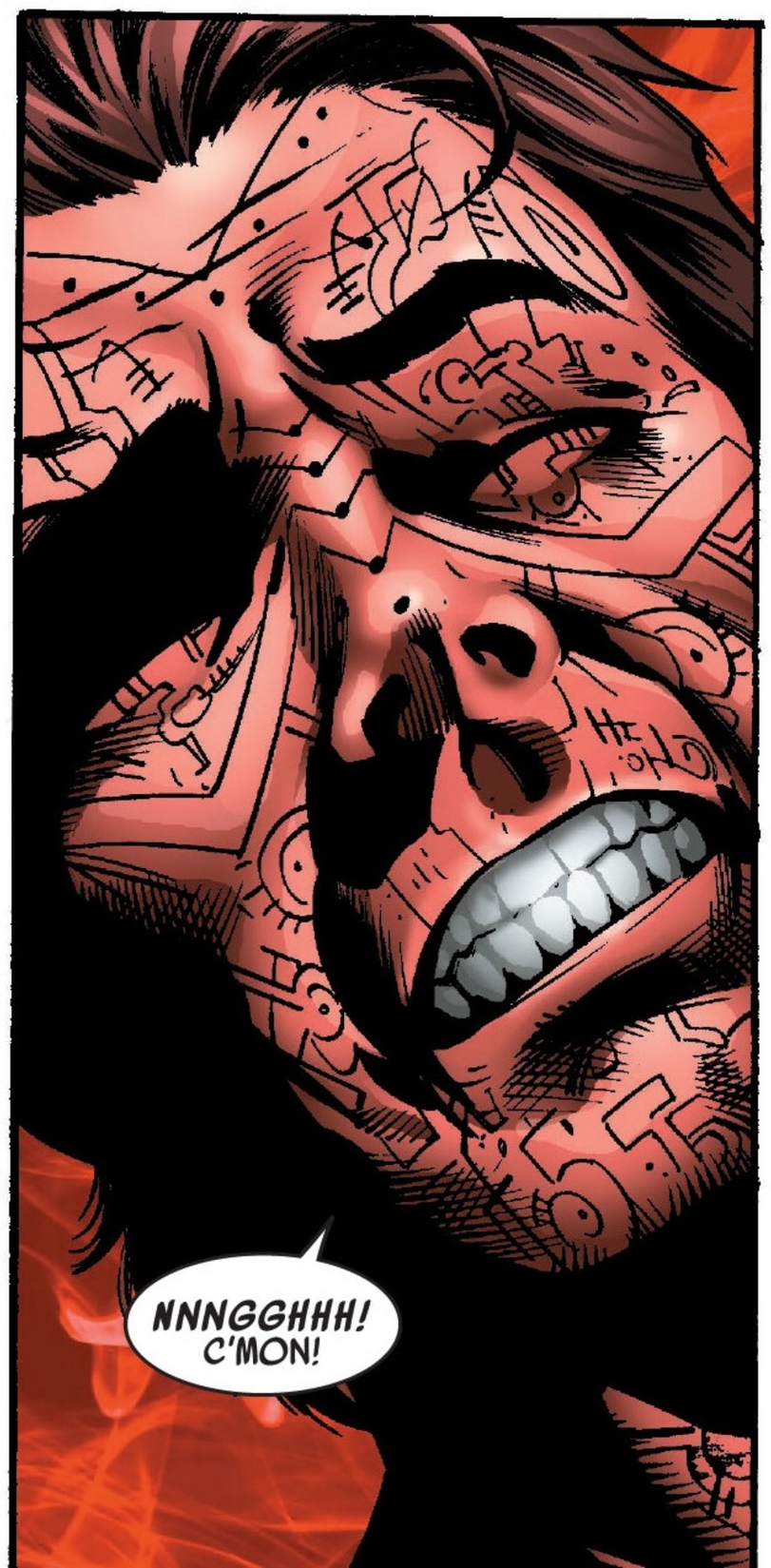
NHHHHHGH!


NHHHHHGH!

RAZOR?
IT'S THE ANOMALY!
THE NEGATIVE ZONE.


THE HUMAN?
YES! IT'S AWAKE AT THE NULL SOURCE!
IT'S TRYING TO INHABIT THE ARMOR!
NHHHH!

IT CANNOT USURP YOU! YOU ARE TOO STRONG!
THE ARMOR WAS FORGED FOR YOU!
I KNOW, I KNOW!
I WILL SUFFER ITS ANNOYING EFFORTS.
THE SERVANTS OF THE SOURCE WILL SOON HAVE IT SUBDUED.


NNNGGHHH! C'MON!

WHAT? THIS IS...
...THIS IS WRONG.
THIS IS THE AMUSEMENT PARK IN QUEENS.
WHERE I FOUND THE AMULET.
FUN HOUSE
THIS IS THE DAY I BECAME DARKHAWK! WHAT THE HELL?!
RUN!
YAAAAH!
MY BROTHERS!
JON! JASON!
WHY CAN'T THEY HEAR ME?
OOOFF!
THEY... PHASED RIGHT THROUGH ME?

OH MY GOD...IT'S ME!
MOVE, GUYS! MOVE!
COME ON! THOSE THUGS ARE STILL COMING!
JON! JASON! MOVE!
GET OUT OF THERE! FIND THE AMULET!
MAYBE THERE'S SOMETHING BACK HERE I CAN USE AS A WEAPON...
THAT'S IT! TAKE IT! USE IT!
AAAHHH!
WHAT THE--
WHAT IS THIS NOW?

THIS IS NO AMUSEMENT PARK.

BUT THAT'S MY ARMOR. THAT'S MY DARKHAWK!

WAIT... WHAT'S HE...?

WHAT ARE YOU DOING? IT'S ME! WHAT ARE Y--

AGHHH!

CHRIS? OPEN YOUR EYES.
WHAT?
DAD?
HEY, SON. HOW'S IT GOING?
DAD, HOW CAN YOU BE HERE?
HOW CAN ANY OF THIS BE HAPPENING?
IT'S JUST MEMORIES, SON. YOUR MEMORIES, AND THE MEMORIES OF THAT ARMOR.
IT'S GOT A LOT OF MEMORIES.
BUT I CAN'T TRUST ANY OF THEM!
NO, YOU CAN'T.
IT'S ALL ABOUT WHAT'S IN HERE.
THAT SUIT WAS NEVER SUPPOSED TO WORK WITH HUMAN BIOLOGY INSIDE IT.
IT'S MADE YOU CRAZY. IT'S MADE YOU ANGRY. BREAKS MY HEART TO SEE IT.
AND EVERYTHING YOU'VE EVER UNDERSTOOD ABOUT IT, THAT'S JUST MAKE-BELIEVE.
YOU MADE IT ALL UP.

I DIDN'T--
YOUR MIND WAS STRUGGLING TO MAKE SENSE OF THE DATASONG POURING INTO IT.
IT WAS A FLOW OF INFORMATION SO FAST AND COMPLEX, YOU WERE CRACKING UP.
SO YOU INVENTED THE ORIGIN STORY OF DARGIN BOKK AND INTERGALACTIC GANGSTERS, BECAUSE YOUR MIND COULD UNDERSTAND A STORY LIKE THAT.
NO, THAT WAS ALL REAL! DARGIN BOKK--
IT WAS ALL IN YOUR HEAD.
BUT I FOUGHT EVILHAWK!
NO, CHRIS. THAT WAS YOU. IT WAS ANOTHER CONFIGURATION OF THE ARMOR THAT TOOK OVER AND RAN AMOK EVERY TIME YOU LOST CONTROL.
OH MY GOD...
WHAT WAS BEHIND THE VISOR, CHRIS? WHAT WAS UNDER THAT HELMET THAT SCARED YOU SO MUCH EVERY TIME YOU GOT THE SLIGHTEST GLIMPSE OF IT?
IT WAS A MONSTER, A--
IT WAS THE TRUTH! IT WAS THE TRUTH LOOKING BACK AT YOU!
NOOOO!

THUMP
NO! NOOO!
THUMP
FSSSH
KRSHH
NHHHHH!
OH.
ONE, TWO, THREE...

...DEAR GOD. THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF THEM. THOUSANDS...
RETURN! RETURN! RETURN!
HUH?

RETURN! RETURN! RETURN!

THE NEGATIVE ZONE.
RAZOR, HOW DO YOU FEEL?
STRONGER, TALON. MORE IN CONTROL.
THE SERVANTS OF THE SOURCE ARE AT WORK. THEY ARE BUSY CONTAINING AND SILENCING THE ANOMALY.
ITS STRUGGLES GROW FEEBLE.
THEN IF YOU'RE RESTED, WE MUST PROCEED.
HE HAS GRANTED US AN AUDIENCE. LET'S NOT WASTE IT.
THE INITIATIVE PRISON 42.

KING BLASTAAR.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU ARE, EXCEPT THAT YOU COME FROM ELSEWHERE AND BEG A MOMENT OF MY TIME.
I HAVE PLENTY OF TIME, BUT LITTLE PATIENCE.
I RECOMMEND YOU BE CONCISE.
WAR HAS BROKEN OUT IN THE POSITIVE UNIVERSE, MY KING.
WE BELIEVE THAT WITH YOUR POWER AND RESOURCES, YOU CAN FUNDAMENTALLY INFLUENCE THAT WAR'S OUTCOME.
WHY SHOULD I CHOOSE TO DO SO? I AM NO MAN'S PUPPET.
OF COURSE NOT. WE ARE SUGGESTING AN ALLIANCE, ONE THAT WILL OFFER GREAT BENEFITS TO YOU.

BENEFITS? I LIKE BENEFITS.
SUCH AS...?

KEEP TALKING...

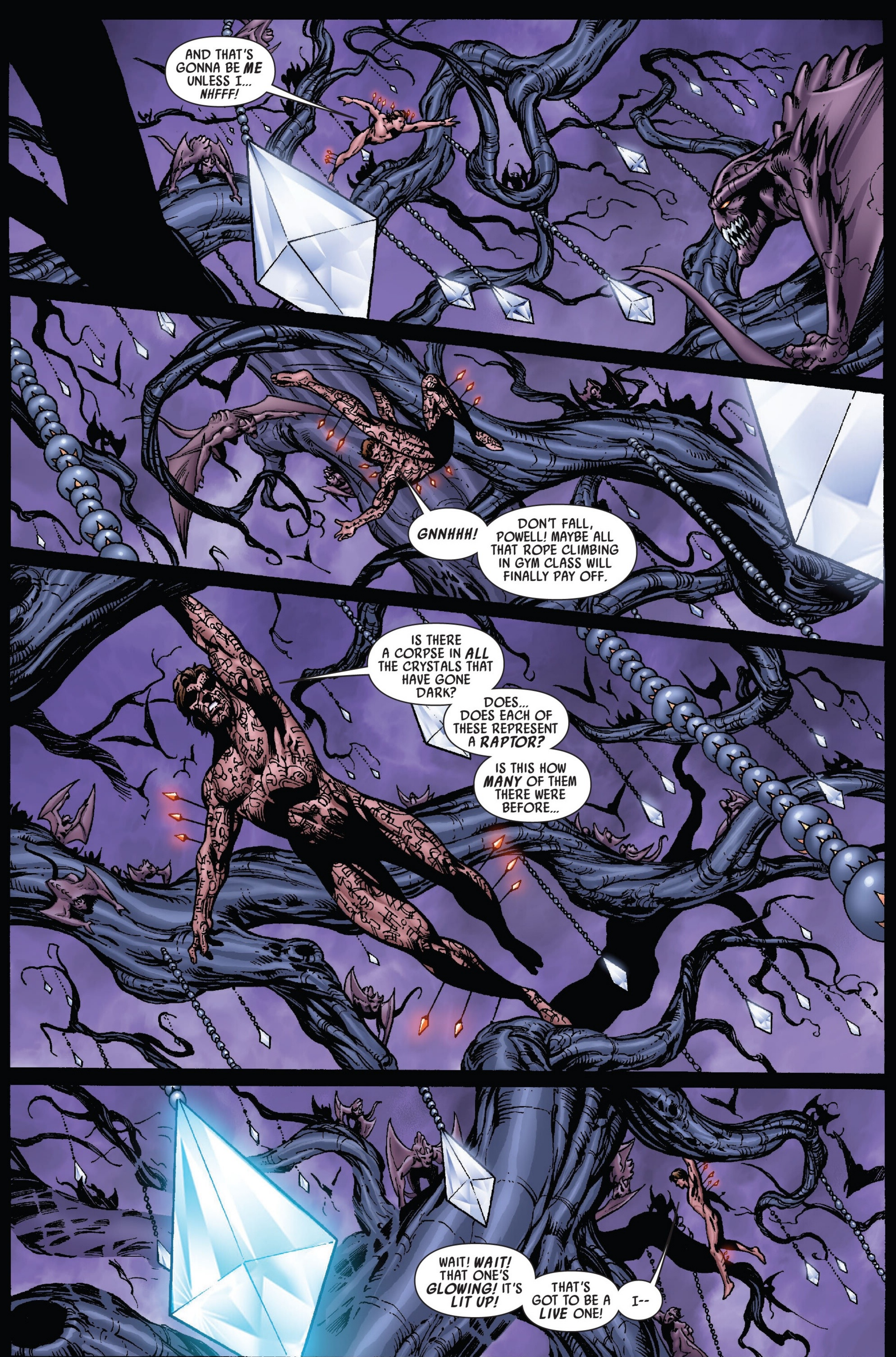
WAR OF KINGS: ASCENSION 3

NULL SPACE.
RETURN! RETURN! RETURN!
GET BACK! LEAVE ME ALONE!
OH GOD, GET ME AWAY FROM THESE FREAKS!
THE END OF ALL THINGS

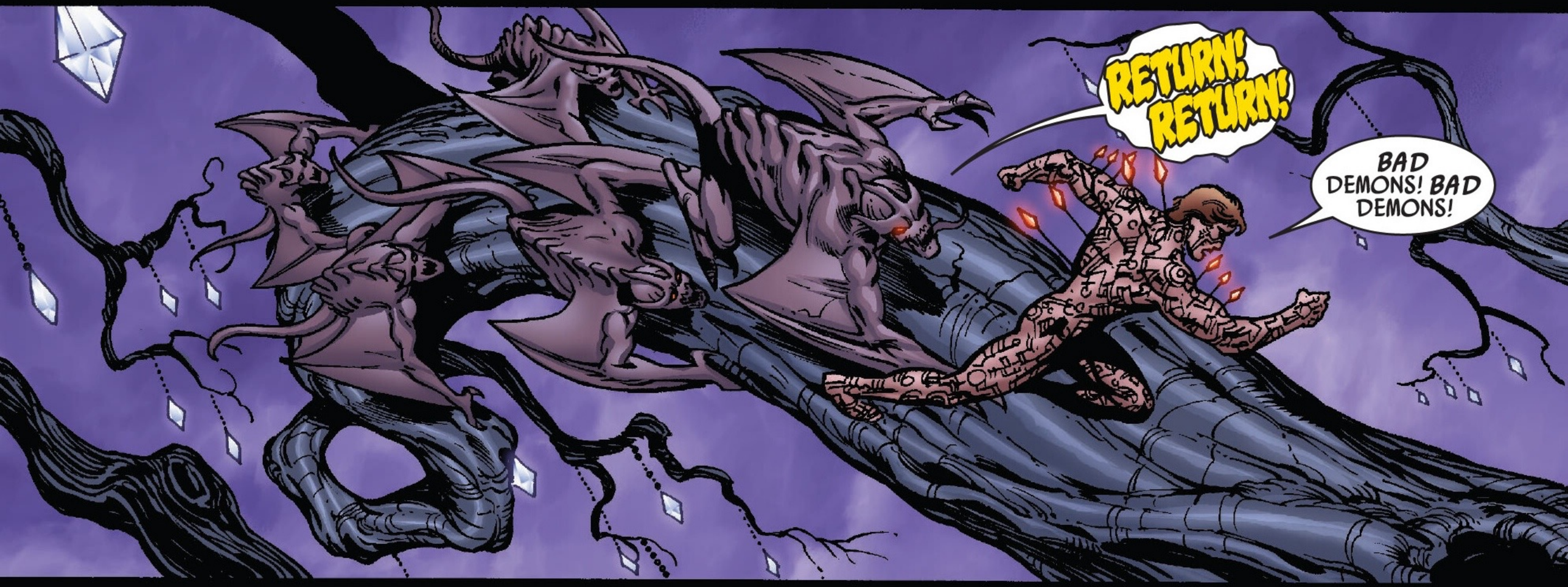
BUT WHERE TO? *WHERE DO I GO?*

ANYBODY SEE A SIGN MARKED *EMERGENCY EXIT?*

GOTTA-- GOTTA GRAB THAT--!
GRROOOOFF!
OKAY, NOW YOU'LL LEAVE ME ALONE, RIGHT? PLEASE?
RETURN! RETURN! RETURN!
EWWWWW... NASTY! INSIDE THIS GEM--THERE'S SOMETHING DEAD!


AND THAT'S GONNA BE ME UNLESS I... NHFFF!
GNNHHH!
DON'T FALL, POWELL! MAYBE ALL THAT ROPE CLIMBING IN GYM CLASS WILL FINALLY PAY OFF.
IS THERE A CORPSE IN ALL THE CRYSTALS THAT HAVE GONE DARK?
DOES... DOES EACH OF THESE REPRESENT A RAPTOR?
IS THIS HOW MANY OF THEM THERE WERE BEFORE...
WAIT! WAIT! THAT ONE'S GLOWING! IT'S LIT UP!
THAT'S GOT TO BE A LIVE ONE!
I--

RETURN! RETURN! RETURN!
OH ****! GOOD DEMONS... NICE DEMONS. SIT. STAY?


RETURN! RETURN!
BAD DEMONS! BAD DEMONS!

YAAAHHH!

NGGHHH! OW! OWWW!
I'M THERE! I'M THERE! I'M--

WAIT! STOP IT! I'M SINKING! NO!
HOLY CRAP! THERE'S A SKRULL IN HERE!
AT LEAST IT'S DEAD. UH... I THINK?
GREETINGS CHRIS POWELL. I AM GRAND COMMANDER H'JKE JEEKU, AND I AM VERY MUCH ALIVE.
YAAAHHH!

INITIATIVE PRISON, THE NEGATIVE ZONE.

NOOOO!

YOU DON'T TELL *ME* WHAT TO DO! I'M BLASTAAR! *KING BLASTAAR!*

NO ONE GIVES ME COMMANDS!

ESPECIALLY NOT SINCE I'VE GOT *THIS...*

THE COSMIC CONTROL ROD WAS A GIFT, KING BLASTAAR.
A GIFT FROM US, THE FRATERNITY OF RAPTORS, TO YOU.
UGHHN!
MY COMPANION TALON IS CORRECT, LORD KING.
THE GIFT WAS A SHOW OF APPRECIATION AND A DOWN PAYMENT ON YOUR COOPERATION.
ARGHH!
COOPERATION?! BAH! IF I WANT TO INVADE EARTH, I'LL INVADE!
THAT'S MY PREROGATIVE AS KING!
THAT'S MY ENTITLEMENT AS THE WIELDER OF THE COSMIC ROD!

RECONFIGURE TO HEAVY COMBAT MODE, BROTHER RAZOR.
AGREED.
FWASH
HEAVY COMBAT MODE CONFIGURED.
I'M AFRAID YOU'VE GOT IT ALL WRONG, KING BLASTAAR.
WE DECIDE WHERE YOU GO AND WHAT YOU DO.
WE DECIDE HOW YOU DEPLOY YOUR NEGATIVE ZONE HORDES.
REALLY? REALLY?! HA HAH!

YOU THINK *YOU* CAN GIVE ORDERS TO THE BEARER OF THIS DEVICE?
NYARR!
NGHHH!
LORD KING, WHAT KIND OF FOOL GIVES A WEAPON *THAT* POWERFUL AWAY--
SHEDRA YGRATH TYAH!
--WITHOUT BUILDING IN A SAFETY CATCH?
NOO! *NOOO!*
WE TOOK THE PRECAUTION OF INSCRIBING THE COSMIC ROD WITH *ARCANE WARDS*, LORD KING.

IT WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH POWER *UNLIMITED*...

...*PROVIDED* YOU WIELD THAT POWER TO FURTHER *OUR* GOALS.

EARTH IS *NOT* A TARGET. IT IS TOO *EARLY* IN THE GAME TO INVOLVE A WORLD THAT *CAPRICIOUS*.

SO WHAT? WE WANT TO *EXPAND!* TO STRIKE FEAR INTO THE *POSITIVE UNIVERSE!*

IF NOT EARTH, THEN *WHERE?*

WE HAVE A TARGET FOR YOUR HORDES, KING BLASTAAR. THE *CEDED TERRITORIES*, RULED BY YOUR OLD NEGATIVE ZONE RIVAL, *RAVENOUS*.

YOU WILL INVADE THEM AND YOU WILL *DESTROY* THEM.

IN DOING SO, YOU WILL BUILD A *FOOTHOLD* FOR YOUR KIND IN THE POSITIVE UNIVERSE...

...AND EARN THE PARTICULAR *GRATITUDE* OF THE SHI'AR EMPEROR *VULCAN*.

DO WE HAVE AN *AGREEMENT?*

I WILL TEACH YOU HOW TO USE THE CONTROL ROD TO OPEN AN *INVASION PORTAL* BETWEEN DIMENSIONS.

HAVE YOUR TROOPS PREPARE FOR TRANSIT.

RAZOR?

IF WE'RE DONE HERE, BROTHER, I AM READY TO DEPART...

...FOR THE THRONEWORLD OF THE SHI'AR.

NULL SPACE.
THOSE THINGS ARE RIGHT OUTSIDE...
...ARE THEY GOING TO ATTACK US?

OF COURSE NOT. THIS IS LORD TALON'S AMULET.
THE SERVANTS OF THE SOURCE WOULD NOT DARE DISRUPT ITS FUNCTION.

ARE YOU GOING TO ATTACK ME?
BECAUSE I AM A SKRULL? NO, HUMAN, I AM NOT.
WE ARE THE SAME NOW, YOU AND I.
HOW?

WE ARE BOTH SACRIFICES. SACRIFICES TO THE BLACK SORCERY OF THE RAPTORS.
I'M NOT LIKING THE SOUND OF THAT.
WHERE ARE WE? HOW DID WE GET HERE? HOW DID YOU GET HERE?
OUR OCCUPATION OF EARTH WAS FINISHED. I WAS LEADING MY FLEET AWAY FROM YOUR WORLD.
THE CITY OF THE INHUMANS CAME AFTER US AND OBLITERATED US...

"I BELIEVE THEIR *SOUND WEAPONS* WERE SO POTENT THEY BROKE OPEN THE *DARK MATTER* OF THE COSMOS IN THAT PLACE.

"THEY *RELEASED* SOMETHING THAT HAD BEEN LOST FOR HALF OF *ETERNITY*.

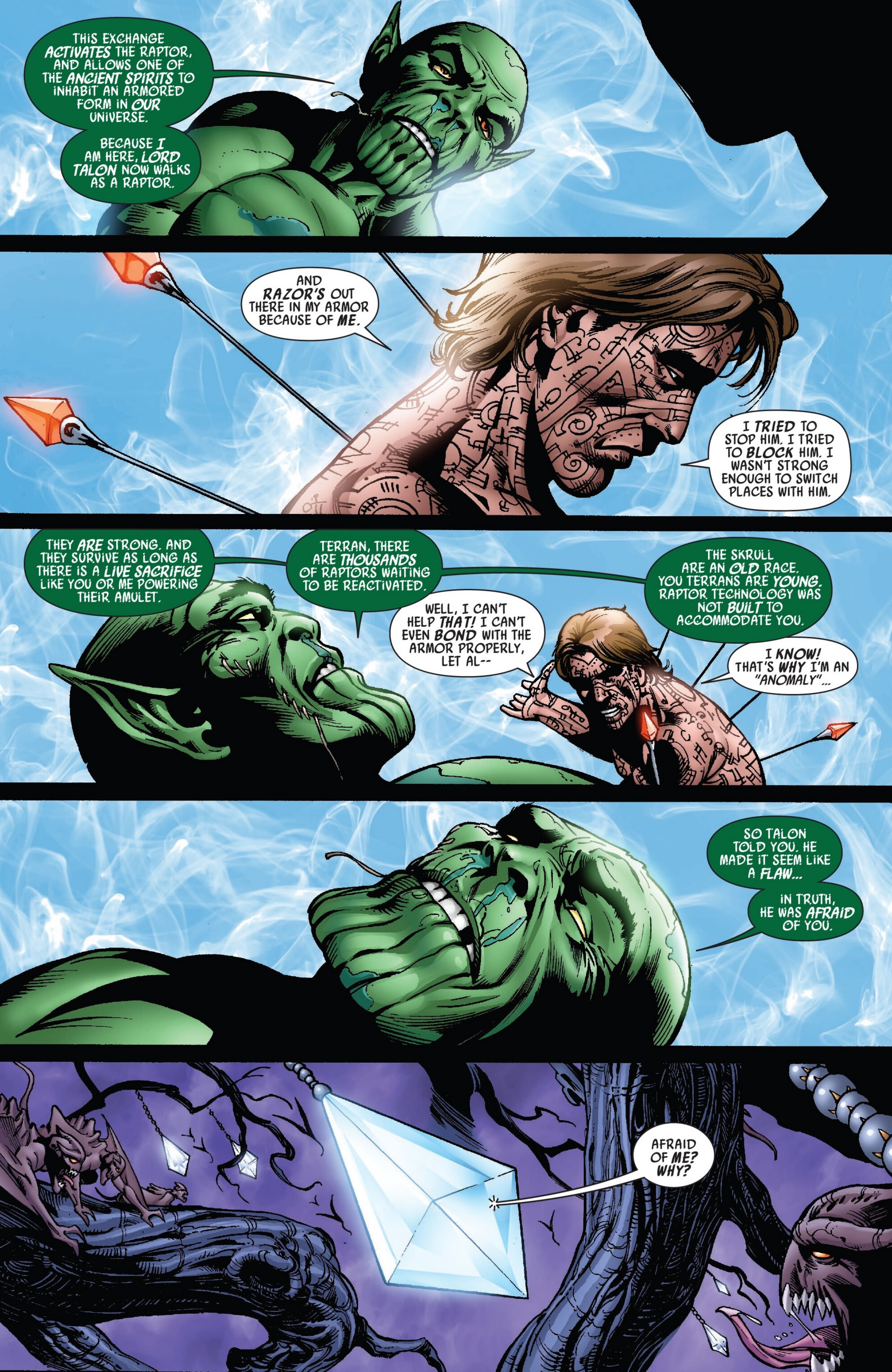
"AN *AMULET*."

A *RAPTOR* AMULET.

I DID NOT KNOW WHAT IT WAS. I WAS ADRIFT IN THE VOID...HELPLESS...IT *FOUND* ME...

"AND IN A FLASH I WAS *HERE*, IN THIS PLACE, WOVEN INTO THIS *SORCERY*.

"EACH AMULET NEEDS A *SACRIFICE*, AN *ORGANIC SPECIMEN* TO BE DELIVERED HERE TO THE SOURCE."


THIS EXCHANGE ACTIVATES THE RAPTOR, AND ALLOWS ONE OF THE ANCIENT SPIRITS TO INHABIT AN ARMORED FORM IN OUR UNIVERSE.
BECAUSE I AM HERE, LORD TALON NOW WALKS AS A RAPTOR.
AND RAZOR'S OUT THERE IN MY ARMOR BECAUSE OF ME.
I TRIED TO STOP HIM. I TRIED TO BLOCK HIM. I WASN'T STRONG ENOUGH TO SWITCH PLACES WITH HIM.
THEY ARE STRONG. AND THEY SURVIVE AS LONG AS THERE IS A LIVE SACRIFICE LIKE YOU OR ME POWERING THEIR AMULET.
TERRAN, THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF RAPTORS WAITING TO BE REACTIVATED.
WELL, I CAN'T HELP THAT! I CAN'T EVEN BOND WITH THE ARMOR PROPERLY, LET AL--
THE SKRULL ARE AN OLD RACE. YOU TERRANS ARE YOUNG. RAPTOR TECHNOLOGY WAS NOT BUILT TO ACCOMMODATE YOU.
I KNOW! THAT'S WHY I'M AN "ANOMALY"...
SO TALON TOLD YOU. HE MADE IT SEEM LIKE A FLAW...
IN TRUTH, HE WAS AFRAID OF YOU.
AFRAID OF ME? WHY?

HE'S AFRAID THAT THE HUMAN MIND MAY BE ABLE TO DO THINGS WITH RAPTOR TECHNOLOGY THAT HE CAN ONLY DREAM OF.
NO. I CAN'T WORK IT. AND IT MAKES ME LOSE CONTROL OF MY TEMPER.
NOT TRUE. THESE ARE JUST SYMPTOMS OF YOUR MIND'S EXPLORATION OF THE TECHNOLOGY.
YOU HAVE ALREADY BROKEN ALL THE RULES AND ACHIEVED GREAT FEATS.
LIKE WHAT?
YOU CAME HERE.
TERRAN, YOUR BODY IS STILL IN YOUR CRYSTAL.
YOUR MIND IS DEVELOPING SUCH FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT, IT LEFT YOUR PHYSICAL FORM BEHIND TO SEEK ME OUT.
NO SACRIFICE HAS EVER MANAGED THAT FEAT. AND THAT IS JUST THE BEGINNING...

CHANDILAR, THE SHI'AR THRONEWORLD.

TALON?

THROUGH THE DATASONG, I HEAR YOU, RAZOR. HAVE YOU ARRIVED?

I'M OVERLOOKING THE CONCOURSE OF THE AERIE AS WE SPEAK.

THERE IS A GREAT THRONG. HISTORY IS BEING MADE TONIGHT BEFORE THE SHI'AR HIGH COUNCIL.

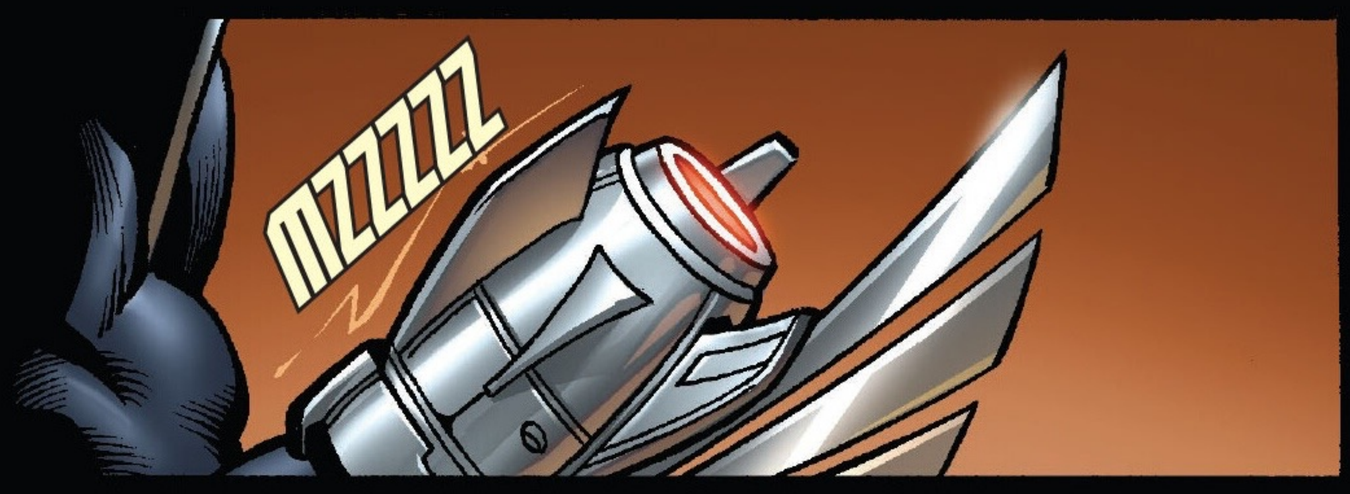
MAJESTOR VULCAN'S THRONE WILL BE TORN FROM HIM BEFORE MIDNIGHT.

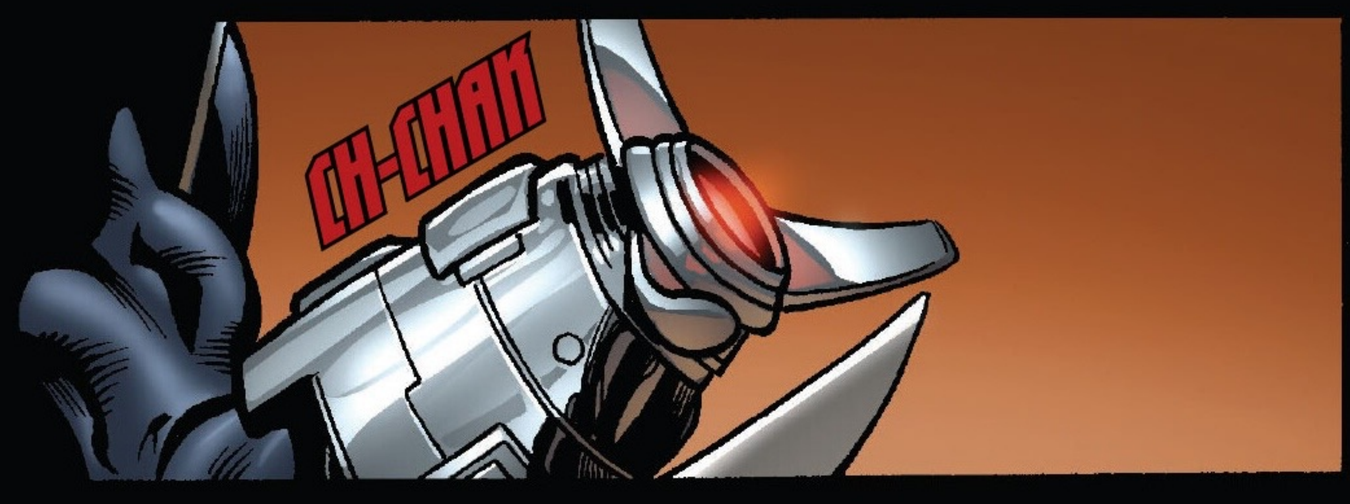
AGREED.

I AM CHOOSING A POSITION.

SELECTING ORDNANCE.

HMMMM

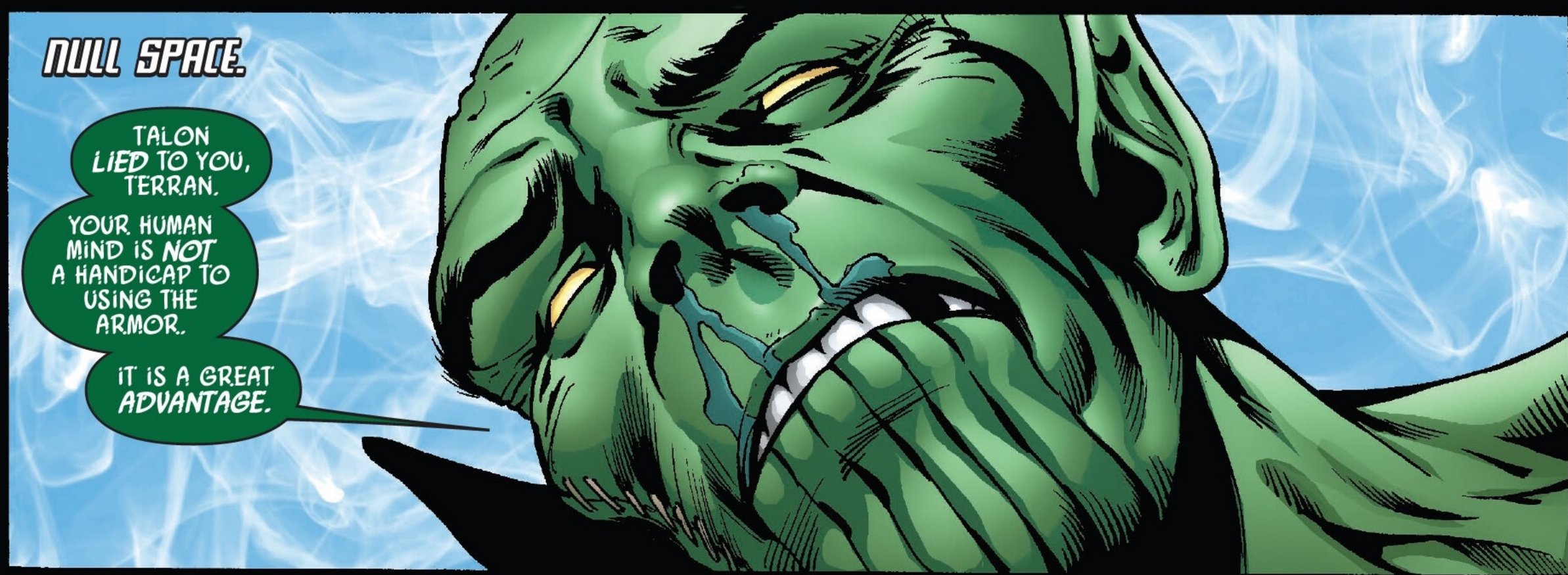

MZZZZZ

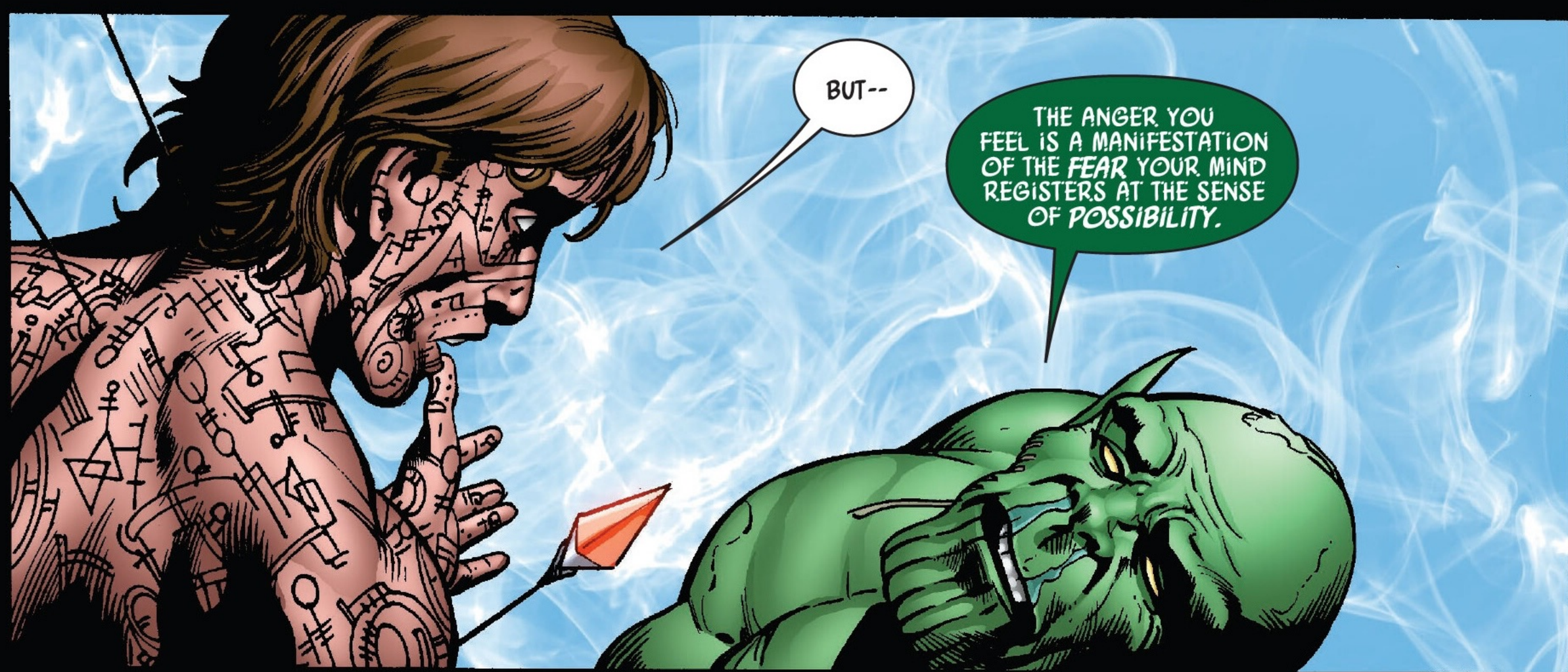

CH-CHAK

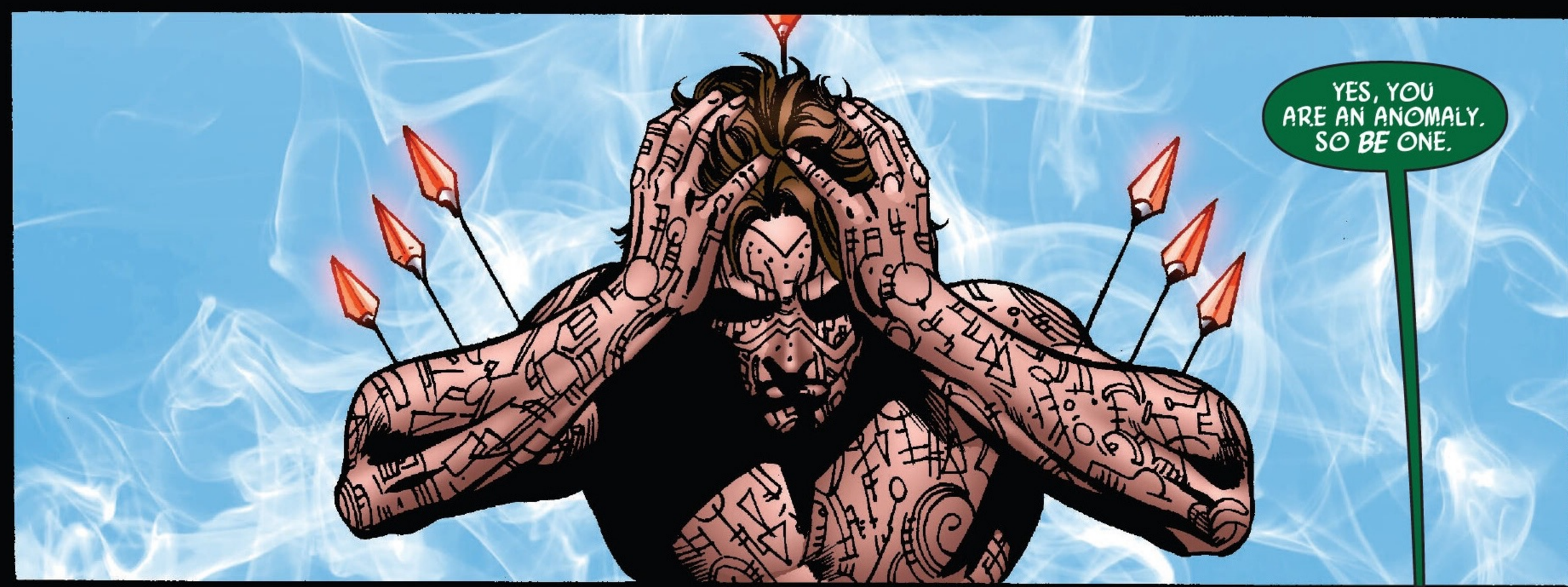
GET CLOSE. BLEND IN.
CURSE THE FALSE EMPRESS!

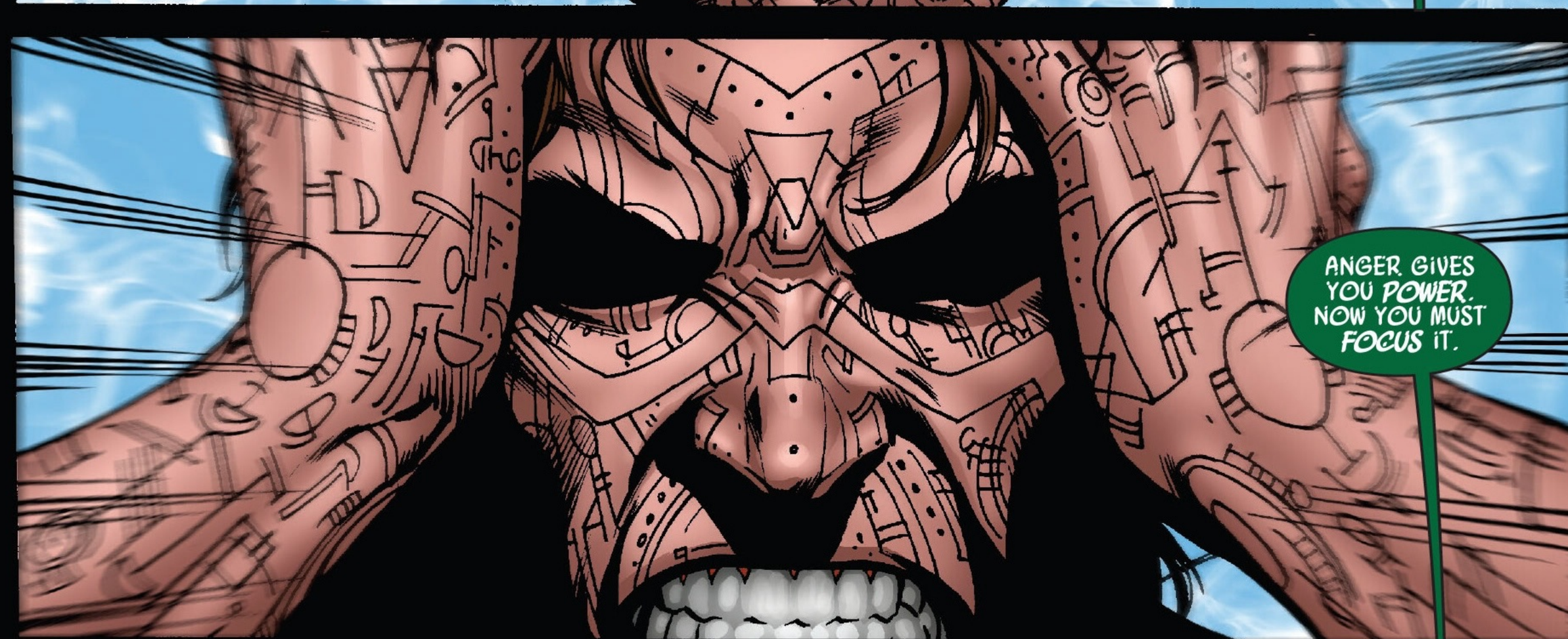
VULCAN SHALL RISE AGAIN!

I WILL. DISGUISE SKIN CONFIGURED.


NULL SPACE.
TALON LIED TO YOU, TERRAN.
YOUR HUMAN MIND IS NOT A HANDICAP TO USING THE ARMOR.
IT IS A GREAT ADVANTAGE.


BUT--
THE ANGER YOU FEEL IS A MANIFESTATION OF THE FEAR YOUR MIND REGISTERS AT THE SENSE OF POSSIBILITY.

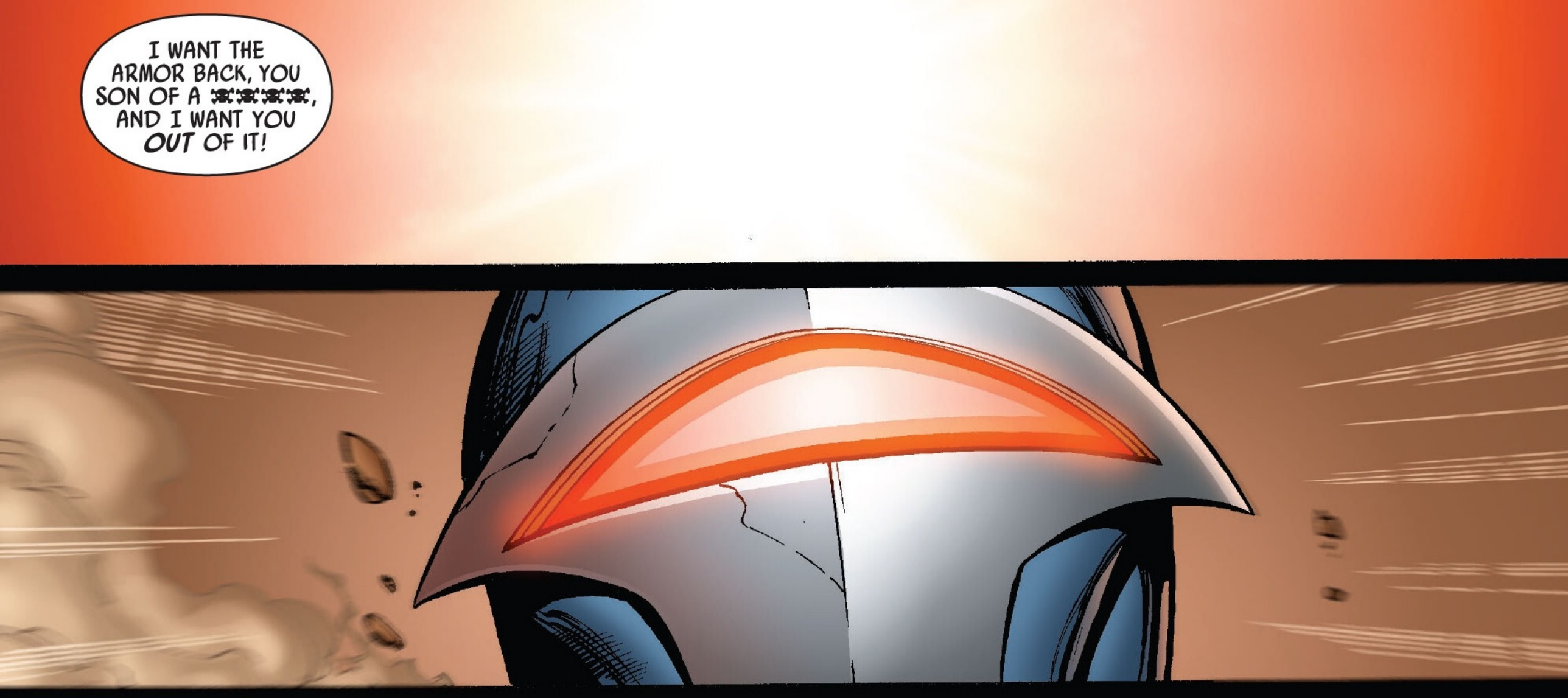

YES, YOU ARE AN ANOMALY. SO BE ONE.


ANGER GIVES YOU POWER. NOW YOU MUST FOCUS IT.

I'M BACK!
BACK IN MY OWN CRYSTAL...

SO I'VE JUST GOT TO FOCUS MY ANGER INSTEAD OF TRYING TO DENY IT, HUH?
A THOUSAND OF NEW YORK'S FINEST ANGER MANAGEMENT COUNSELORS WOULD CALL YOU CRAZY, MR. SKRULL.

RAZOR... I WANT THE ARMOR BACK.


I WANT THE ARMOR BACK, YOU SON OF A ****, AND I WANT YOU OUT OF IT!

I DID IT! I DID IT!
SHE FALLS! SHE'S DEAD!
I FORCED RAZOR OUT! I'M BACK IN!
BUT WHERE THE HELL AM I? ALL THESE PEOPLE, YELLING...

OH MY GOD...
LILANDRA! THE EMPRESS IS MURDERED!
WHAT'S HAPPENING? WHO'S THAT WOMAN?
FIND THE KILLER! FIND HIM NOW!
HE'S RIGHT THERE. HIS WEAPON STILL GLOWS HOT FROM HIS KILLING SHOT.
WAIT! YOU MEAN...
YOU THINK I DID THIS?

IT WASN'T ME! I'M NO KILLER!
RAZOR, WHAT DID YOU MAKE ME DO?!

WAR OF KINGS: ASCENSION 4

CHANDILAR, THE SHI'AR THRONEWORLD. THE CONCOURSE OF THE AERIE.
ASSASSIN! I WILL HAVE YOUR HEAD!
FUGITIVE

HE'S TURNING INVISIBLE!
STAND AND FIGHT, YOU COWARD!
FZZMM
ZZKOW

IT HAD TO BE ONE OF THOSE WRETCHED DEATH COMMANDOS!
MARVEL GIRL, CAN YOU PICK UP HIS THOUGHTS?
THE KILLER'S RIGHT HERE, HAVOK!
HE'S USING SOME KIND OF STEALTH-TECH TO BLEND IN...HE COULD BE ANY ONE OF THESE CIVILIANS!
BUT I CAN SENSE HIM! I SAW HIM! I SAW HIS MIND!

THERE! THERE!
RACHEL... AIM ME!

OH, I SEE YOU NOW...

UGHNNN!
WDOOM

I SEE THE MURDERER!
BLAST MUST'VE SHORTED OUT HIS CAMOUFLAGE FIELD!
WAIT! WAIT! YOU'VE GOT THIS WRONG!
I DIDN'T DO IT! I DIDN'T KILL ANYONE!

SHUT UP! THAT METAL SUIT WON'T PROTECT YOU FROM ME!
UHGGNN!

ARGHH! STOP IT!
HER MAGNETICS'VE GOT ME TIGHT! GOTTA SWITCH FAST...

...CARBON-FIBER LIGHTWEIGHT SUIT!
HIS ARMOR'S ALTERED...

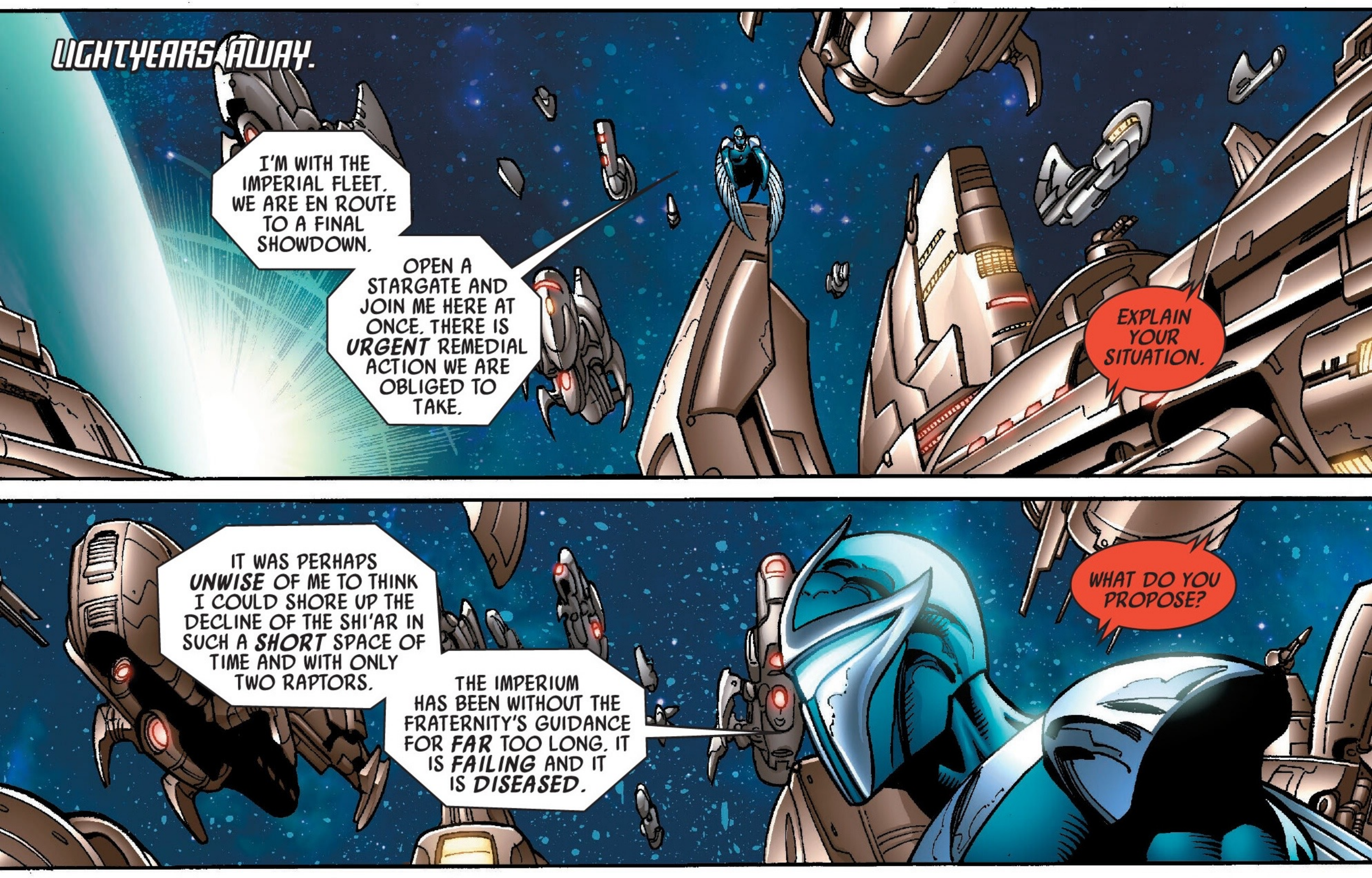
...BUT HE SHOULD'VE KEPT THE METAL STUFF!
I TOLD YOU, I'M NOT THE KILLER!
GUUHHN!
KORVUS, BACK OFF!
NFFF!
WHY WON'T YOU LISTEN TO ME?
I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING!
YEAH, YOU JUST SHOT LILANDRA IN COLD BLOOD!
I DON'T WANT TO FIGHT YOU! IT WASN'T ME!
UGHNN!

I'M TELLING YOU--IT WASN'T ME!
JUST LEAVE ME--
UGHHNF!
MY LIFE SUCKS.

GHH-KK-KKK!
THE EMPRESS WAS WORTH A THOUSAND OF YOU! A MILLION!
AND NOW YOU WILL BE NOTHING!
CLEAR THE CONCOURSE! CLEAR THE CONCOURSE!
MARTIAL LAW HAS BEEN IMPOSED!
DISORDER WILL BE MET WITH LETHAL FORCE!
ZZSKOM

NO FURTHER WARNINGS!
SUPPRESSION FIRE!
COVER, STARJAMMERS! GET TO COVER!
PALACE SECURITY IS COMING IN ULTRA-HARD!
GLADIATOR?!
WHERE DID THE ASSASSIN GO? GLADIATOR?
THIS IS INSANE! WHAT HAVE I DROPPED MYSELF INTO?
WHAT ARE THEY BLAMING ME FOR?
WHO DID THAT PSYCHO RAZOR KILL WHILE HE WAS IN THE ARMOR?
OKAY, LET'S TRY THE ONLY DISGUISE I HAVE LEFT...MYSELF.

JUST GOTTA KEEP CALM--LOOK FOR SOME WAY TO HIDE, OR--
RAZOR? RAZOR?
TALON?
RAZOR! THROUGH THE DATASONG, RESPOND TO ME!
IS THE SANCTION COMPLETE? HAVE YOU ELIMINATED LILANDRA NERAMANI?
THERE'S NO "RAZOR" HERE ANY MORE!
I'VE TAKEN THE ARMOR BACK!
POWELL? THE HUMAN PARASITE? NO!
RAZOR! REASSERT YOUR WILL! BANISH HIM FROM THE SUIT!
NEVER GOING TO HAPPEN!
NO?
WHEN I CAN AMPLIFY RAZOR'S SIGNAL FROM THE SOURCE THROUGH THE DATASONG?
YOUR REACQUISITION OF THE RAPTOR ARMOR IS TEMPORARY AT BEST.
ARRGHHH!
RAZOR? I TRUST YOU HAVE REGAINED CONTROL.
I...I HEAR YOU, TALON. WHERE ARE YOU?


LIGHTYEARS AWAY.
I'M WITH THE IMPERIAL FLEET. WE ARE EN ROUTE TO A FINAL SHOWDOWN.
OPEN A STARGATE AND JOIN ME HERE AT ONCE. THERE IS URGENT REMEDIAL ACTION WE ARE OBLIGED TO TAKE.
EXPLAIN YOUR SITUATION.
IT WAS PERHAPS UNWISE OF ME TO THINK I COULD SHORE UP THE DECLINE OF THE SHI'AR IN SUCH A SHORT SPACE OF TIME AND WITH ONLY TWO RAPTORS.
THE IMPERIUM HAS BEEN WITHOUT THE FRATERNITY'S GUIDANCE FOR FAR TOO LONG. IT IS FAILING AND IT IS DISEASED.
WHAT DO YOU PROPOSE?

VULCAN IS NOT A VIABLE PAWN. HE IS TOO HEADSTRONG AND VULGAR. HE IS NOT EVEN SHI'AR.
HE HAS SYSTEMATICALLY IGNORED ALL MY ATTEMPTS TO ADVISE HIM. THIS WAR IS FUTILE AND COSTLY, YET HE PERSISTS WITH IT.
SEE? I AM TRANSMITTING FEED TO YOU VIA THE DATASONG.

BEHOLD HOW THE MADMAN VULCAN HAS REJECTED MY INSTRUCTIONS TO SUSPEND HOSTILITIES.
LOOK AT HIM. HE'S PSYCHOTIC. HE WANTS A HEAD-ON CLASH WITH THE INHUMAN-KREE.
HE IS SO CONFIDENT, HE'S TAKING THE WAR TO THEM PERSONALLY. THE ENTIRE FLEET IS RACING TO CATCH UP WITH HIM.

THIS IS HIS TARGET, MOVING DIRECTLY INTO SHI'AR SPACE.
EXAMINATION OF THE KREE WARNET REVEALS THEY CALL IT "THE T-BOMB."
IT IS A WEAPON OF MASS DESTRUCTION, AN EXPLOSIVE DEVICE BASED UPON THEIR ECHO-TECHNOLOGY.
IT IS KING BLACK BOLT'S FINAL SOLUTION TO THE WAR. HE INTENDS TO ANNIHILATE THE SHI'AR FORCES.
SO WE ARE TO STOP HIM, TALON?
NO. SOMETIMES IT IS NECESSARY TO CROP BACK RUTHLESSLY IN ORDER TO ENCOURAGE HEALTHY GROWTH.
THE T-BOMB WILL DO OUR WORK FOR US.
IT WILL REMOVE THE ODIOUS VULCAN AND CLEAR THE THRONE. IT WILL BURN BACK THE IMPERIUM'S EXCESS BULK, LEAVING IT IN A STATE WHERE WE CAN BEGIN TO REBUILD PROPERLY.
IT WILL LEAVE THE SHI'AR VULNERABLE.
THIS SUITS OUR GREAT PURPOSE.
VULNERABLE, THEY WILL CRY OUT FOR HELP AND LEADERSHIP, AND THE FRATERNITY OF RAPTORS WILL BE THERE TO PROVIDE IT.

"THAT WILL BE THE *OTHER* BENEFIT OF THE DETONATION. ECHO-WEAPONS SEEM *ESPECIALLY* GOOD AT BREAKING OPEN THE DARK MATTER OF THE UNIVERSE AND *EXPOSING* THE MISSING AMULETS.

"THE T-BOMB WILL BRING *MORE* OF US BACK."

...SURPRISE!

EVERYTHING
HULL BREACH! HULL BREACH!
THRA-CHOOM
EMERGENCY! INTRUDERS! HANGAR DECK SIXTEEN!

SO, RAZOR DIDN'T COME BACK AND REMOVE YOU, POWELL?

HE TRIED. I KEPT HIM OUT.

I LEARNED A LOT ON THE NULL, YOU FREAKSHOW.

UGHHN!

I'M AN ANOMALY, ALL RIGHT! I'M BONDED TO THIS SUIT IN WAYS YOU CAN'T UNDO!

THEN YOU ARE TOO DANGEROUS TO LIVE.
ZCHMMM
ZCHMMM
OKAY, TALON, I CAN PLAY THAT GAME!
HEAVY DUTY SUIT, HUH?
TA-ZZRCH
ESPECIALLY NOW THAT I KNOW HOW TO FOCUS MY ANGER!
K-TANG

STOP THEM! PUT THEM DOWN-- HARD!
IMPERIAL GUARD? ELITE TROOPS?
BEGONE! THIS ISN'T YOUR FIGHT!
UGHHN!
SO NOW YOU TRY TO RUN?
BRING IT, TALON, AND STOP HURTING INNOCENTS!
WHAT DO I CARE WHETHER THEY ALL LIVE OR DIE?!
WHAT'S THE MATTER?
HAVE I MADE YOU ANGRY?

HATCH BLOWN! ENGINE ROOM!

SECURE THE DRIVE CORE!

SECURE THE CORE! HURRY! DON'T LET THEM DAMAGE IT OR--

UGHNN!

GET.

OUT.

IT WAS ALL FUTILE, HUMAN. YOU WILL DIE IN THE END, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.

OR...I MAKE YOU MAD...UGHN... GET ROUND YOUR GUARD...

GET IN CLOSE...JUST LIKE YOU DID...

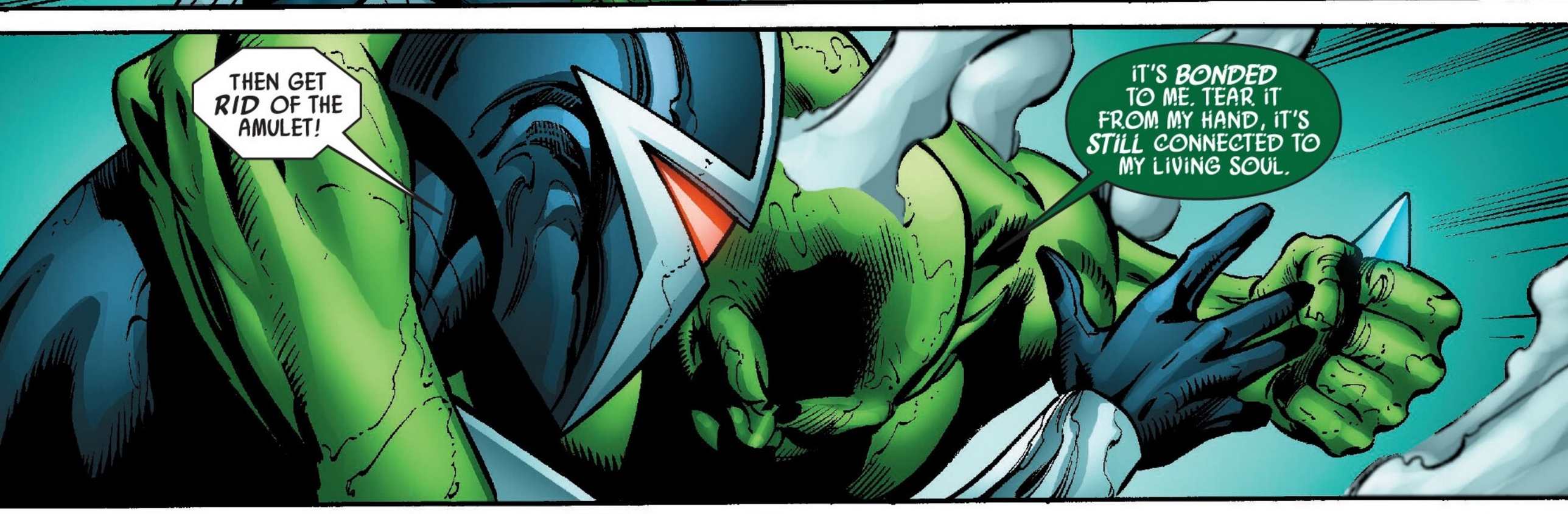
TALON, I THINK IT'S TIME SOMEONE CLEANED YOU OUT OF THAT ARMOR. LIKE YOU DID TO ME.
WHAT? WHAT?!
GO! LEAVE! DEPART!
EARRGHHH!
ZZSKRA-DOOM

WHAT HAPPENED?
IS THAT YOU, HUMAN? HAVE YOU BROUGHT ME OUT OF THE NULL?
WE ANOMALIES CAN DO AS WE PLEASE, GRAND COMMANDER H'JKE JEEKU.
I THOUGHT IT WAS TIME YOU AND TALON SWITCHED PLACES AGAIN.

WHERE ARE WE?
THE ENGINE ROOM OF A SHI'AR WARSHIP, COMING UP ON THE KREE FRONTIER.
I'M NOT EVEN GOING TO ASK WHY. SOMEONE ELSE'S WAR, NO DOUBT. SOMEONE ELSE'S DESTINY.

NHH!
JEEKU?
HE'S FIGHTING TO RETAKE CONTROL.
THEN FIGHT HIM.

I DON'T HAVE YOUR STRENGTH, HUMAN. I DON'T HAVE YOUR UNIQUE RESISTANCE.
GNNHHH! THE RAPTOR IS TRYING TO SWITCH BACK. I CAN FEEL HIS RAGE.


THEN GET RID OF THE AMULET!
IT'S BONDED TO ME. TEAR IT FROM MY HAND, IT'S STILL CONNECTED TO MY LIVING SOUL.

ANY SECOND NOW, HE'LL REASSERT.
NO, HUMAN. YOU BROUGHT TALON DOWN. YOU SET ME FREE.
THEN I'VE FAILED.

STOP THE REST, HUMAN. THAT'S ALL I'M ASKING.
I'LL DEAL WITH THIS ONE THE WAY A TRUE WARRIOR DEALS WITH HIS ENEMY.
YOU STOP THE REST. STOP ALL THOSE OTHER AMULETS FROM HATCHING OUT. FIND THEM! SMASH THEM!

I WILL.
GNNHHH! SWEAR IT!
I SWEAR, JEEKU!

GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME.
JEEKU!
ZSSRTCH

HE THREW HIMSELF INTO THE WARP ENGINE! HE DESTROYED HIMSELF TO STOP TALON!
OH MY--
THERE'S THE INTRUDER! SEIZE HIM!
WHAT DO I DO? JEEKU, WHAT DO I DO?
DO I TURN MYSELF IN FOR RAZOR'S CRIMES? DO I END THE CURSE OF MY AMULET THE WAY YOU DID?
OR...
LAST WARNING, INTRUDER!
UGHNN!

OKAY, NOW I'M THE GALAXY'S MOST WANTED. THIS ISN'T HOW I THOUGHT MY "GREAT SPACE ADVENTURE" WOULD GO.
BUT I MADE A PROMISE TO JEEKU, AND I INTEND TO KEEP IT. I MAY BE A FUGITIVE...
...BUT I'M GOING TO FIND THE SCATTERED AMULETS AND PREVENT THE FRATERNITY OF RAPTORS FROM EVER BEING REBORN!
THEIR REIGN ENDS WITH ME!

Years ago, the Hulk was exiled to the savage planet of Sakaar. He became its king and took a wife, Caiera the Oldstrong, wielder of the Old Power. Caiera died in the bombing that destroyed Crown City and sent the Hulk back to Earth seeking revenge. . . but her unborn son survived. His half-Hulk, half-Shadow blood has grown him broad and tall. He is Skaar, Son of Hulk.

WAR OF KINGS: SAVAGE WORLD OF SKAAR

DEEP SPACE. NO MAN'S LAND.
I'VE BEEN TO SCORES OF GALAXIES, AND I HAVE NEVER SEEN ENERGY EMISSIONS LIKE THESE.
HELMSMAN! HOW IS IT WE WERE UNAWARE OF THIS PORTAL?
BUT WE WERE AWARE OF IT, SIR! IT'S ON OUR STARCHARTS AS A WHIRLPOOL...A NATURALLY OCCURRING WORMHOLE IN SPACE. TOO CHAOTIC FOR INTERSTELLAR TRAVEL...
...IT'S A HAZARD SHIPS ARE WARNED TO STEER CLEAR OF, LEST THEY BE SUCKED IN. BUT THERE ARE NO RECORDS OF IT EMITTING SUCH POWER.
I AM STARBOLT. A VETERAN OF THE SHI'AR IMPERIAL GUARD. THE FINEST WARRIORS IN ALL THE UNIVERSE.
I MUST REPEAT THIS TO MYSELF, LEST I FORGET THAT IT WOULD BE UNSEEMLY TO STRIKE A SUBORDINATE OFFICER...NO MATTER HOW SLOW-WITTED HE MAY BE.
PERHAPS THEN, HELMSMAN, WE SHOULD DETERMINE WHETHER THIS NEW DEVELOPMENT IS A THREAT TO EMPEROR VULCAN...OR SOMETHING HE CAN USE TO HIS ADVANTAGE.
Y-YES, SIR.
THE...THE ENERGY DOES NOT APPEAR DIRECTED AT US, SIR. RATHER, IT SEEMS TO BE RESIDUAL OVERSPILL FROM SOMETHING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PORTAL.
Hm. IF THE BACKWASH IS THIS POWERFUL, IMAGINE WHAT A WEAPON THIS ENERGY SOURCE WOULD BE IF WE COULD HARNESS IT. HOW IT COULD AID US IN THE WAR WITH THE KREE--
INCOMING! ENEMY SHIP ON AN INTERCEPT COURSE! SIR...
...IT'S KREE!
ATTENTION, SHI'AR SCUM! KNOW THAT GORGON, OF THE INHUMAN ROYAL FAMILY, HAS MARKED YOU FOR DEATH!

THOUGH YOUR COWARDLY ATTACK ON MY COUSIN'S WEDDING BRANDS YOU UNWORTHY OF HONORABLE TREATMENT, MY KING ***BLACK BOLT*** IS NEVERTHELESS MERCIFUL.

SURRENDER NOW AND YOU SHALL LIVE. THIS IS YOUR ***ONLY WARNING.***

REFUSE, DAMN YOU. COUNTLESS SOULS ***CRY OUT*** FOR VENGEANCE.

SUCH ***ARROGANCE!*** I'D NEVER HAVE IMAGINED THE KREE COULD GET ***WORSE,*** BUT NOW THAT THEY'RE RULED BY THESE ***EARTHERS...***

HEAR ME, INHUMAN. THIS IS ***STARBOLT,*** OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD. AND ***HERE*** IS MY ANSWER.

OPEN FIRE! ALL WEAPONS!

AH, THANK AGON. IN YOUR NAME, HONORED DEAD--

DIE, CURS!!

THEIR HEADS FOR THE EMPEROR!

SIR, WE'RE HEADED STRAIGHT FOR THE WORMHOLE. ITS GRAVITATIONAL PULL--

MAINTAIN COURSE! I WANT THEIR SHIELDS ***SHREDDED!***

WE'RE BEING PUSHED TOWARD THE PORTAL--WE MUST TAKE EVASIVE ACTION!

RUN? ***NEVER! KEEP FIRING!***

YOUR PARDON, SIR, BUT IT WILL SOON BE--

***SSHVOOO

WE'RE CAUGHT! CAN'T...PULL US OUT!
THE ENEMY IS CAUGHT AS WELL. IF WE DIE, KNOW THAT WE DIE *VICTORIOUS.*
STRAP YOURSELVES IN! *CRASH POSITIONS!*
CONTROLS AREN'T RESPONDING!
CURSE ME FOR A FOOL. I'VE PUT *VENGEANCE* BEFORE THE MISSION.
MAYDAY, MAYDAY! WE ARE CRASH-LANDING ON AN UNIDENTIFIED PLANET WITH VITAL DATA ON THE WORMHOLE, ITS ENERGY SPIKES AND THE ENEMY!
CONTROL, DO YOU READ? DO YOU--
*CONTROL TO GORGON ->SKZZT<- SEND **LOCKJAW** TO RETRIEVE YOU, BUT ->ZZKZZ<- ESTIMATE TWELVE HOURS TO LOCATE YOUR POSITION DUE TO SPATIAL DISTORTION...*
...ADVISE MOVING TO HIGH GROUND FOR PROPER TRACKING ->ZZZT<- ANY IDEA OF YOUR LOCATION?
CONTROL FROM GORGON. POSITIONING SYSTEMS DAMAGED. READINGS INDICATE HABITABLE ATMOSPHERE. WILL ATTEMPT TO IDENTIFY PLANETARY CHARACTERISTICS. OVER.
CASUALTIES?
SKATAMM
ONLY MINOR BRUISES, SIR. THE CRASH SEATS PROTECTED US.
GOOD. READY WEAPONS...WE'RE GOING OUTSIDE. IF WE RECOGNIZE A NATIVE RACE OR STAR FORMATION, IT'LL GET RESCUE HERE THAT MUCH FASTER.

AGON'S BONES.
WHAT FRESH HELL IS THIS?
THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY

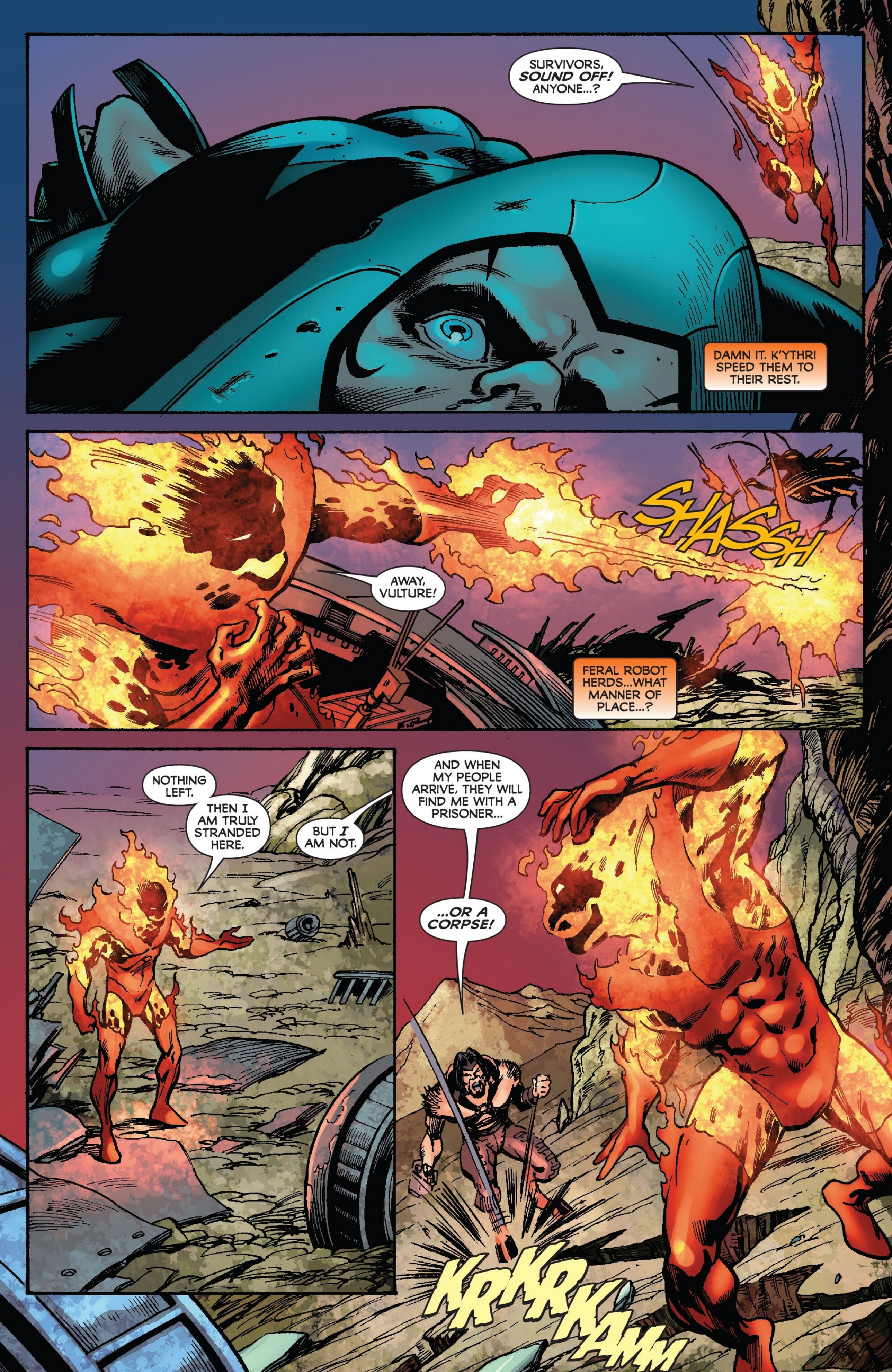
SHRZZ
YOURS.
CARELESS. I DRILL CADETS EVERY DAY ON RINTAR'S "THE ART OF BATTLE," YET FORGET ITS TEACHINGS MYSELF.

"THE WARRIOR WHO LOOKS AWAY FROM HIS ENEMY LOOKS TOWARD DEATH."
FIRE! USE THE SHIP AS COVER!

I'LL TAKE TO THE AIR. STRIKE FROM ABOVE.
THAT RUMBLING– WHAT--
GORGON STAMPING HIS BESTIAL FOOT, NO DOUBT. IF THAT'S THE BEST HE CAN DO, WE HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR.
BUT IT'S COMING FROM THE OTHER--

SHLANG
CLANG
KTANG
BRRRMMM
--SIDE--
SHARRA'S TALONS!
AAGH!
AIIEE!

STAND YOUR GROUND!
KRAAM
STAY STRONG! THEY SEEM TO BE AFTER THE SHIP, NOT US! IF WE CAN WITHSTAND THE INITIAL SWARM, WE'LL BE--
--AH.


SURVIVORS, SOUND OFF! ANYONE...?
DAMN IT. K'YTHRI SPEED THEM TO THEIR REST.
SHASSH
AWAY, VULTURE!
FERAL ROBOT HERDS...WHAT MANNER OF PLACE...?
NOTHING LEFT.
THEN I AM TRULY STRANDED HERE.
BUT I AM NOT.
AND WHEN MY PEOPLE ARRIVE, THEY WILL FIND ME WITH A PRISONER...
...OR A CORPSE!
KRKKRKAMM

SAVAGE! *YOUR* RECKLESS ATTACK BROUGHT US HERE!
THE DEATHS OF *BOTH* OUR CREWS ARE ON *YOUR HEAD!*
YOU TRIED TO *BURN MY COUSIN ALIVE* ON HER *WEDDING DAY!*
MY MEN WOULD HAVE *SLIT THEIR OWN THROATS* TO LAY YOU LOW.
I'LL SEE THEY DIDN'T DIE IN VAIN!
SKRAKK

R-RUN! *KIK* RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!
OLD SAM! HOW HAVE WE SINNED, THAT THE GODS CAUSE *SAKAAR ITSELF* TO PUNISH US SO?
NOT GODS.

JUST *FOOLS* WITH MORE POWER THAN SENSE. PRESENT COMPANY *NOT* EXCEPTED.

I RECOGNIZE THE RACES THE INVADERS BELONG TO. *KREE* AND *SHI'AR*--INTERSTELLAR CONQUERORS.

DO YOU SUPPOSE IT'S COINCIDENCE THAT THEY CAME HERE NOW... *TOGETHER?*

HRRR...

NOR DO I. IT WAS YOUR RECKLESS USE OF THE *OLD POWER* THAT BROUGHT THEM HERE, SKAAR. EMPIRES RESPOND TO POWER IN ONLY *TWO* WAYS.

THEY *CRUSH* IT... OR THEY TAKE IT FOR *THEMSELVES.*

NOW THEY'LL NEVER LEAVE US IN PEACE.

UNLESS THEIR PEOPLE...

...NEVER HEAR FROM THEM AGAIN.

SHARRA'S LOINS!!
WHKRAMM
WHERE ARE THEY COMING FROM?
I'M LESS CONCERNED ABOUT THAT--
SHKRAAK
--THAN NOT BEING HERE WHEN THEY ARRIVE!
KRKAME
HNH. PROBLEM SOLVED.
YOU MISSED.
DOESN'T MATTER. NIGHT'S FALLEN. THEY CAN'T SEE EACH OTHER TO FIGHT ANY MORE...

"...AND THEY'LL NEVER LIVE TO SEE MORNING."

CAN'T SEE THE GUARDSMAN... ***STARBOLT,*** I THINK HE'S CALLED. WITH THAT FLAME OF HIS, IF HE WAS ANYWHERE NEARBY, I'D KNOW.

PROBABLY AS BLIND AS ME IN THIS BLACKNESS. AND COLD. HOW DID IT GET SO ***COLD*** SO ***QUICKLY?*** LIKE DESERT WEATHER ON EARTH, BUT MULTIPLIED A HUNDRED TIMES...

HAVE TO FIND WOOD... MAKE A FIRE. A BIT OF ***FOOD*** WOULDN'T HURT, IF ANYTHING ON THIS BACKWATER IS EDIBLE. THEN GET TO HIGH GROUND SO LOCKJAW CAN SCENT ME.

TO HELL WITH THE SHI'AR. I'VE ALREADY WON THAT BATTLE. HE HAS NO WAY OFF THIS PLANET.

WHAT HE ***DOES*** HAVE IS HIS OWN SELF-GENERATED HEAT SUPPLY, CURSE HIM. STILL...HE'S STRANDED. I'M FAR BETTER OFF THAN HE. ***FAR*** BETTER.

IF I CAN JUST KEEP FROM FREEZING TO DEATH...

DAMN THAT INHUMAN. I'D IMAGINE HE CAN JUST CURL UP LIKE A ***LUPOID*** AND BE KEPT WARM BY HIS OWN FLEA-RIDDEN ***HAIR.***

WHILE I HAVE TO FIND AN EXTERNAL ***HEAT SOURCE*** TO REPLENISH MY BIO-ENERGY. OR THIS RELENTLESS COLD WILL SOON KILL MY FLAME... AND ***ME WITH IT.***

ONWARD, THEN. I MAY NOT SURVIVE UNTIL MORNING. BUT I REFUSE TO GIVE MY ENEMY THE SATISFACTION...

...OF OUTLIVING ME.

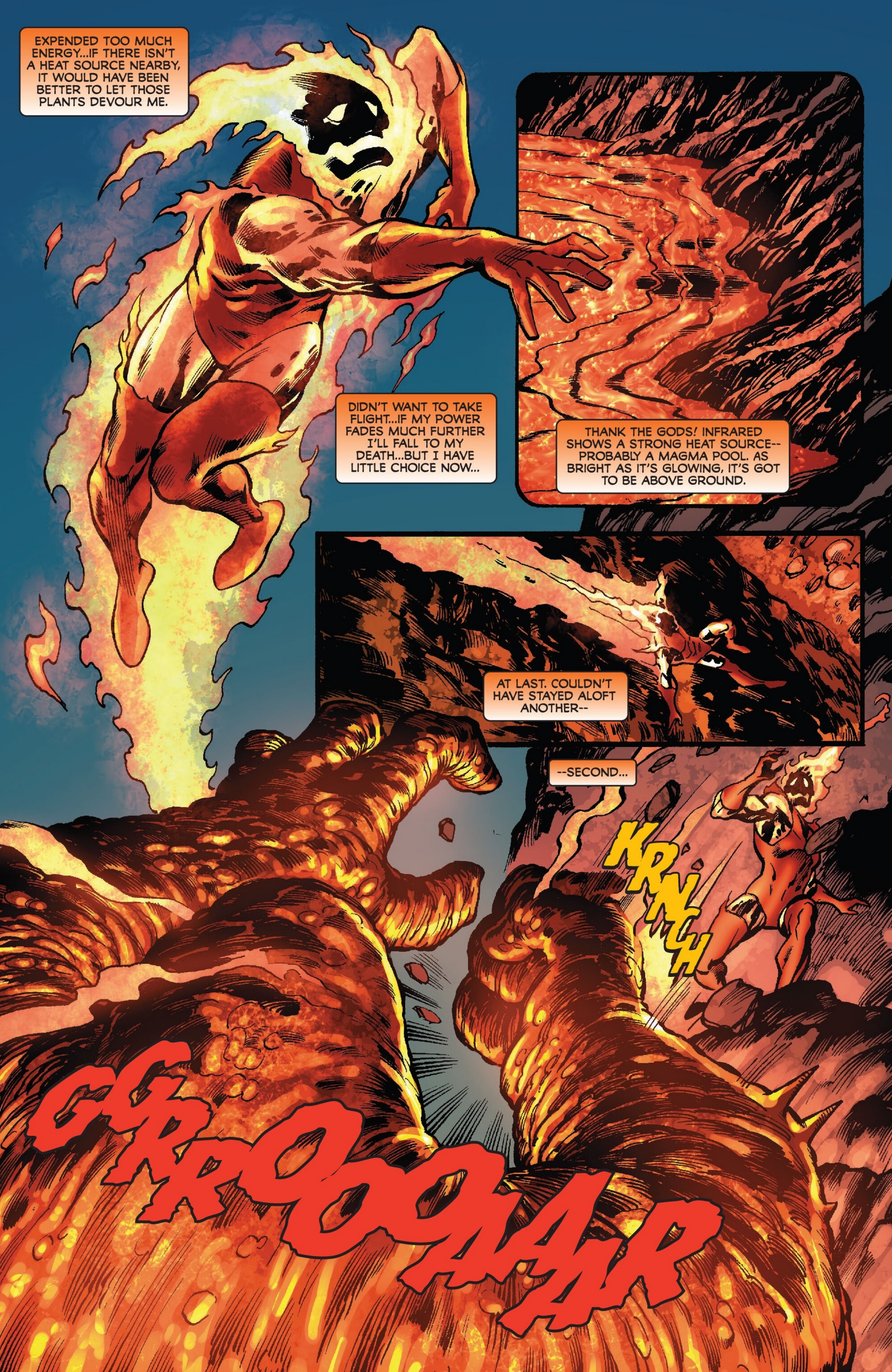
MIGHT AS WELL BUILD A FIRE. IT WON'T BE ENOUGH TO RESTORE MY ENERGY, BUT IT'LL SLOW THE DECLINE...GIVE ME TIME TO THINK.
I SAW WHAT APPEARED TO BE *MAGMA POOLS* NEAR THE MOUNTAINS. IF I CAN REACH ONE...

DEAD...AND IT LOOKS FRESH.
THE *ALPHA PRIMITIVES* WOULD GET QUITE A LAUGH OUT OF THIS--A MEMBER OF THE *ROYAL FAMILY* REDUCED TO EATING CARRION. BUT I AM NOT TOO PROUD TO--

WHAT--?
KRAAGH!

RREEEE
BY THE GREAT REFUGE!

THEY BURN ON CONTACT, BUT THERE ARE TOO MANY...THEY'LL SOON SMOTHER MY FLAME AND DRAG ME DOWN, UNLESS...
AAGH! FOUL BEAST! YOU WANT A TASTE?
NO!
I SHALL BE FREE!
FWASSH!
FEAST ON THIS!
THRAMM
SHREEE!


EXPENDED TOO MUCH ENERGY...IF THERE ISN'T A HEAT SOURCE NEARBY, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER TO LET THOSE PLANTS DEVOUR ME.
DIDN'T WANT TO TAKE FLIGHT...IF MY POWER FADES MUCH FURTHER I'LL FALL TO MY DEATH...BUT I HAVE LITTLE CHOICE NOW...
THANK THE GODS! INFRARED SHOWS A STRONG HEAT SOURCE--PROBABLY A MAGMA POOL. AS BRIGHT AS IT'S GLOWING, IT'S GOT TO BE ABOVE GROUND.
AT LAST. COULDN'T HAVE STAYED ALOFT ANOTHER--
--SECOND...
KRNCH
GRROOAAAR

NO EFFECT. NOT SURPRISING--THE CREATURE'S HABITAT IS MOLTEN LAVA.
VERY WELL. I MEET DEATH IN SERVICE TO MY EMPEROR. I PRAY SHARRA AND K'YTHRI CAN FIND MY SPIRIT ON THIS GODFORSAKEN--

KRNCH
HRRR!
YOU HAVE A TALENT FOR MAKING ENEMIES, GUARDSMAN.
SHUT YOUR BARBARIC MOUTH, INHUMAN. I WILL NOT DIE WITH YOUR TAUNTS IN MY EARS.
YOU NEEDN'T DIE AT ALL. I WILL GLADLY AID YOU...
...IF YOU'LL SIMPLY SURRENDER TO ME.

BUT I SUGGEST YOU DECIDE QUICKLY. YOUR FRIEND WILL BE REJOINING US SOON.
...
TO *YOU?* *NEVER!*
AS YOU WILL. INJURED AS I AM, I COULD USE SOME HELP SURVIVING THIS HELLHOLE, BUT I TRUST THE MONSTERS MORE THAN YOU.
UNLESS YOU GIVE YOUR WORD TO BE MY PRISONER. OR DIE HERE, USELESSLY. IT'S ALL THE SAME TO ME.
I WILL TELL YOU NOTHING. EVEN UNDER TORTURE.
I AM LOATH TO ADMIT IT...BUT HE HAS COURAGE, THIS ONE.
I DO NOT EXPECT YOU TO BETRAY YOUR CAUSE. ONLY TO COME QUIETLY WHEN MY TRANSPORT ARRIVES. YOU WILL BE WELL AND HONORABLY TREATED AS A PRISONER OF WAR.
DO WE HAVE A BARGAIN?
VERY WELL.

GOOD.

KTOOM

BRRRMMMMM

LATER.
WELL STRUCK, GUARDSMAN! SLAIN AND COOKED IN THE SAME STROKE. THE LARGER PORTION SHALL BE YOURS.
UNNECESSARY. MY SUSTENANCE CAME FROM THE MAGMA POOL. I NO LONGER REQUIRE FOOD.
"NO LONGER?" THEN ALL YOUR PEOPLE ARE NOT LIKE YOU?
NO, IGNORANT ONE. I UNDERWENT A TRANSFORMATION, LONG AGO...TO BETTER SERVE MY HOMEWORLD AND MY EMPEROR.
MY BODY WAS CONVERTED TO ENERGY. ITS PHYSICAL WEAKNESSES, ITS... ATTRIBUTES...ARE NO MORE.
THEN YOU--THAT IS TO SAY, YOU HAVE NO FAMILY?
I HAVE OUTLIVED THOSE I WAS BORN TO. AND IT IS... IMPRACTICAL... TO CONSIDER MARRIAGE.
DO NOT LOOK AT ME THAT WAY, OAF. SACRIFICE FOR ONE'S MONARCH IS NO FOREIGN CONCEPT TO YOU. OUR INTELLIGENCE INDICATES YOUR MONSTROUS FORM IS A RECENT MUTATION.
I...WAS MERELY THINKING THAT WE SHOULD MOVE ON. THERE'S MUCH CLIMBING TO BE DONE BEFORE DAWN.
IT'S A HOARY TRUISM THAT, BUT FOR CIRCUMSTANCES OF BIRTH, ONE MIGHT HAVE BEEN A FRIEND TO ONE'S ENEMIES. A TRUISM THAT HAS NEVER CHANGED THE NEED FOR WAR.
STARBOLT SET CRYSTAL ABLAZE IN HER WEDDING DRESS. IF SHE DID NOT CONTROL THE ELEMENTS, SHE'D HAVE DIED IN AGONY.
AND YET, HE FIGHTS WITH COURAGE...
...SOME OTHER MEMBERS OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD REGARD THE JOY I FIND IN BATTLE AS UNSEEMLY.
HMPH. MY COUSINS AS WELL. THOUGH I SELDOM HEAR COMPLAINTS WHEN WE'RE SURROUNDED BY BLASTER FIRE.
HA! NOR I.
HE'S AS CRUDE AS OUR SPIES REPORTED. AND YET--AFTER THE INTRIGUE AND BACKSTABBING OF THE IMPERIAL PALACE, IT IS...REFRESHING TO SPEAK PLAINLY.
LOOK. DAWN IS BREAKING.
GOOD. WE'LL HAVE A BETTER IDEA OF WHERE WE...

...AGON'S BONES.

OLD WOMAN! THE DEVASTATION HERE LOOKS FRESH.

WHAT COULD HAVE *CAUSED* THIS?

A *BATTLE,* STRANGER. BETWEEN A WIELDER OF THE *OLD POWER...*

...AND THE *SON OF THE HULK.* WHOSE *MOTHER* COMMANDED THE OLD POWER...AND WHO CLAIMS IT AS HIS *BIRTHRIGHT.*

THE SON OF--?

"HULK?" THE NAME IS A STRANGE ONE TO ME. BUT YOU LOOK AS IF SOMEONE HAS SET YOUR *BEARD* AFIRE. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

IT MEANS THAT THIS "OLD POWER" IS MIGHTY INDEED.

AND THAT THIS PLANET HOLDS EVEN *GREATER* PERIL THAN WE REALIZED. IT BEHOOVES US TO LEAVE IT *AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.*

THAT'S THE FIRST SMART THING I'VE HEARD FROM EITHER OF YOU.

YOU SHOWED MORE SENSE THAN I GAVE YOU CREDIT FOR, HELPING EACH OTHER SURVIVE THE NIGHT. COULD BE YOU'RE SMARTER THAN YOU LOOK.

IF YOU ARE, YOU'LL LEAVE THIS PLANET AND NEVER COME BACK. BECAUSE IF YOU EVER BRING ANY OF YOUR PEOPLE HERE...

...I'LL KILL THEM. AND YOU.

WHRTCH
MAGMA...BUBBLING FROM THE GROUND WHERE HE STRUCK...
STARBOLT. ON MY MARK, HIT THE MONSTER WITH ALL YOUR POWER!
DONE.
HE DOESN'T ASK WHY. SMART MAN.
NOW!!
THOOOM
AT THIS MOMENT, IT DOESN'T *MATTER* WHETHER WE CAN TRUST EACH OTHER. IF THIS DOESN'T WORK...
SHRZZAKK
...WE ARE BOTH *DEAD.*

...RANDAC'S NAME...

...CAREFUL... YOUR HAND...
DON'T WORRY. I MAY NOT BE A MEMBER OF OUR *SCIENCE COUNCIL,* BUT I CAN DEDUCE THAT YOUR UNIFORM IS FIREPROOF.
DID WE... DID WE *WIN...?*
AYE. THE SON OF THE HULK IS DEAD.

WRONG.

BRROOM
THAT WON'T HOLD HIM LONG.
NO. YOUR ENERGY--?
DEPLETED. AND I THINK WE'VE ESTABLISHED THAT HEAT WON'T HURT HIM.
YES.
WELL THEN.
OUR DIFFERENCES ASIDE...IT PLEASES ME TO FALL IN BATTLE AT THE SIDE OF A VALIANT WARRIOR.
AND ME. DIE WELL, GORGON.

FASSH
WHAT--?
WELL MET, LOCKJAW.

TAKE US HOME, BOY.
FASSH

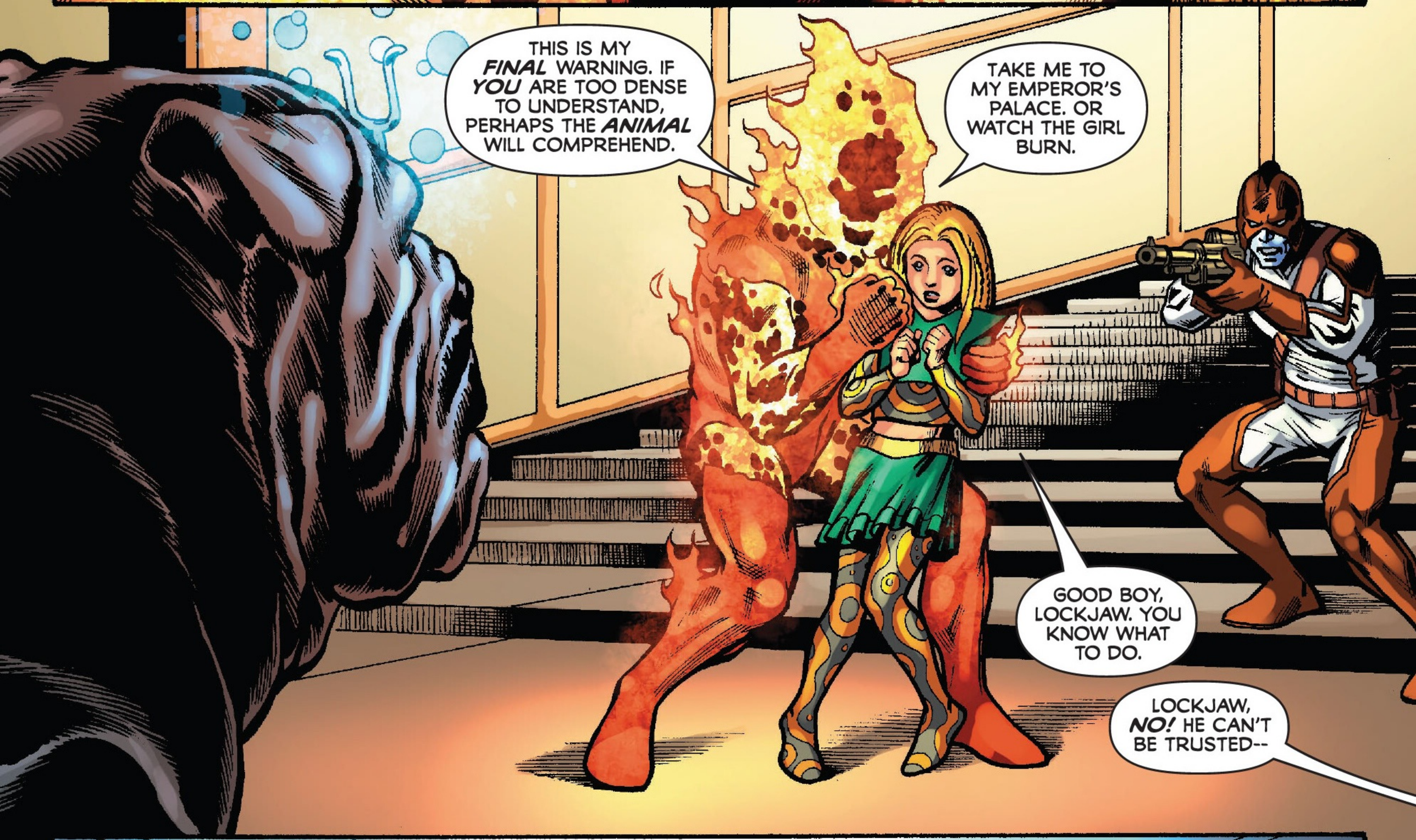
THOOOM

HRN.

LOCKJAW!
WHERE--?
THE *INHUMAN ROYAL PALACE.* OUR ORDEAL IS OVER.
YOU ACQUITTED YOURSELF BRAVELY ON THAT DEVIL-PLANET, GUARDSMAN... *STARBOLT.*
YOU HELD UP YOUR END OF OUR BARGAIN. AND I SHALL FULFILL MINE. YOU WILL BE TREATED NOT JUST WITH MERCY, BUT WITH *RESPECT,* AS AN HONORED PRISONER OF WAR.
MOST GENEROUS...
...BUT I HAVE A *BETTER* IDEA.
LUNA!!
COMMAND THE BEAST TO TELEPORT ME TO THE *SHI'AR THRONEWORLD.* OR THE CHILD *DIES.*

CURSE ME FOR A FOOL! I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN A SHI'AR WOULD THINK NOTHING OF DISHONORING HIMSELF BY GOING BACK ON HIS WORD...
...OR THREATENING A HELPLESS CHILD.

YOU INHUMANS FORFEITED ANY CLAIM TO HONORABLE TREATMENT WHEN YOU SLAUGHTERED SHI'AR TROOPS WITHOUT PROVOCATION AT THE START OF THE WAR.
IT'S YOU WHO SET THE TERMS OF THE FIGHT. I MERELY PLAY BY THEM.


THIS IS MY FINAL WARNING. IF YOU ARE TOO DENSE TO UNDERSTAND, PERHAPS THE ANIMAL WILL COMPREHEND.
TAKE ME TO MY EMPEROR'S PALACE. OR WATCH THE GIRL BURN.
GOOD BOY, LOCKJAW. YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO.
LOCKJAW, NO! HE CAN'T BE TRUSTED--

FASSH

THE SHI'AR THRONEWORLD.
COMMANDER STARBOLT? WHERE DID YOU--
STOP YOUR IDIOTIC GAPING AND TAKE THIS PRISONER INTO CUSTODY!
BOTH OF THEM, SIR?
BOTH--?
YOU WERE RIGHT.
LOCKJAW IS SMARTER THAN US.
EVERYONE DOWN!
FZZATT
PRAY TO YOUR GODS YOU NEVER SEE ME AGAIN, STARBOLT. FOR WHEN YOU DO...
...IT WILL MEAN YOUR DEATH IS NIGH.
FASSH

LATER.
...REGRETTABLY, MY LADY MEDUSA, STARBOLT SURVIVED. MY FIRST CONCERN WAS *LUNA,* SINCE IT WAS *MY* LACK OF JUDGMENT THAT PLACED HER IN DANGER.
YOU ACTED PROPERLY, GORGON. DO NOT FEAR. YOU SHALL HAVE YOUR RECKONING WITH THE SHI'AR SOON ENOUGH.
BUT YOUR LORD *BLACK BOLT* WISHES TO KNOW...WHAT DID YOU LEARN WHILE STRANDED ON THIS...*"SAKAAR,"* I BELIEVE YOU SAID THE NATIVES CALL IT?
IS THERE ANYTHING ABOUT IT WORTH *BOTHERING* WITH? OR WAS YOUR WHOLE TRIP A COLOSSAL WASTE OF TIME?
THE PLANET ITSELF IS A BARBARIC *BACKWATER,* EMPEROR VULCAN. A *DEATHTRAP* RIFE WITH MONSTERS AND INHOSPITABLE TERRAIN.
HOWEVER, I *DID* COME ACROSS *ONE* NOTEWORTHY FEATURE. IT IS NOT AN ASPECT OF THE *PLANET* AT ALL...BUT RATHER, AN *ELEMENTAL FORCE* MANIPULATED BY CERTAIN OF ITS *RESIDENTS.*
NOMADIC PRIESTS CALLED THE SHADOW PEOPLE, WHO ROAM THROUGHOUT THE GALAXY.
THEY CALL IT THE *"OLD POWER."* AND ANY WHO WIELD IT GAIN THE ABILITY TO *TEAR A PLANET ASUNDER.*
ACCORDING TO OUR READINGS, IT WAS *USE* OF THE OLD POWER THAT CREATED THE *ENERGY SPIKES* THAT DREW US TO THE WORMHOLE TO BEGIN WITH.
INTERESTING.
VERY INTERESTING.

IF *WE* DO NOT CLAIM THIS "OLD POWER," THE *ENEMY* SURELY WILL. THAT CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO HAPPEN.
THERE IS ONLY ONE OPTION.

WE'LL JUST HAVE TO TAKE IT FIRST.

Eager to rebuild the Nova Corps, Worldmind took over Ego the Living Planet and recruited scores of humans to fill the Corps' ranks — including Richard Rider's brother, Robbie. When Richard protested, the Worldmind stripped him of his powers. Now he has nobody to turn to except newly resurrected Wendell Vaughn, the former Quasar — and Project: P.E.G.A.S.U.S.'s Dr. Necker, who discovered that without the Nova Force, Richard will be dead in 48 hours.

NOVA 23

WELL, THE LIKENESS SUCKS, BUT WOULD YOU CHECK OUT THE POINTS OF ARTICULATION?
END OF STORY

ROBERT RIDER'S QUARTERS, PROJECT: P.E.G.A.S.U.S. CAMPUS.

'COURSE, THIS WOULD BE WORTH *REAL MONEY* IF IT WAS THE RARE *"PONYTAIL"* VARIANT.

CAN YOU BELIEVE ROBBIE STILL *COLLECTS* THIS STUFF?

I DON'T THINK I EVER REALLY REALIZED HOW MUCH HE *ENVIED* ME.

HOW MUCH HE WANTED TO *BE* ME.

OH, ROBBIE...

HAVE YOU BEEN HERE ALL NIGHT?

WHAT?

HAVE YOU BEEN HERE ALL NIGHT, RICHARD?

YEAH, WENDELL, I SLEPT HERE. IT WAS KINDA *COMFORTING* TO HAVE HIS STUFF AROUND ME.

I WANT TO HELP YOU, RICH, BUT I DON'T KNOW *HOW*. I *BARELY* HAVE A HANDLE ON THIS NEW FORM I'M INHABITING.

I JUST--

DON'T SWEAT IT, WENDELL. I DID THIS. AND I'M A *BIG BOY*, SO I HAVE TO DEAL WITH IT MYSELF.

TAKE A LOOK AT THIS! HE SUBSCRIBED TO *ALL* THE FAN-SITES.

PLEASE, RICH. I THINK YOU NEED TO TALK TO SOMEONE ABOUT THIS.

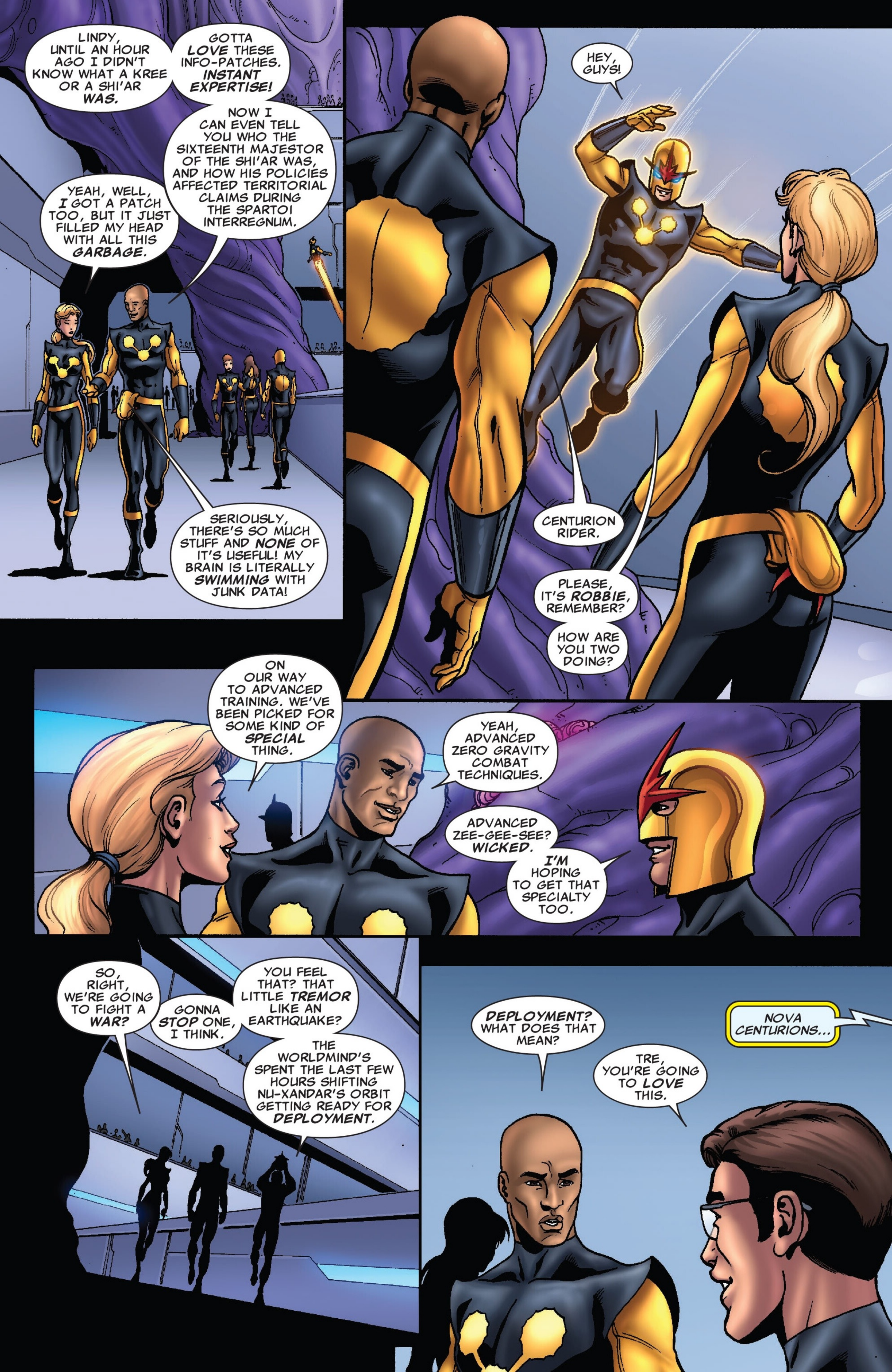
ABOUT THE FAN-SITES?

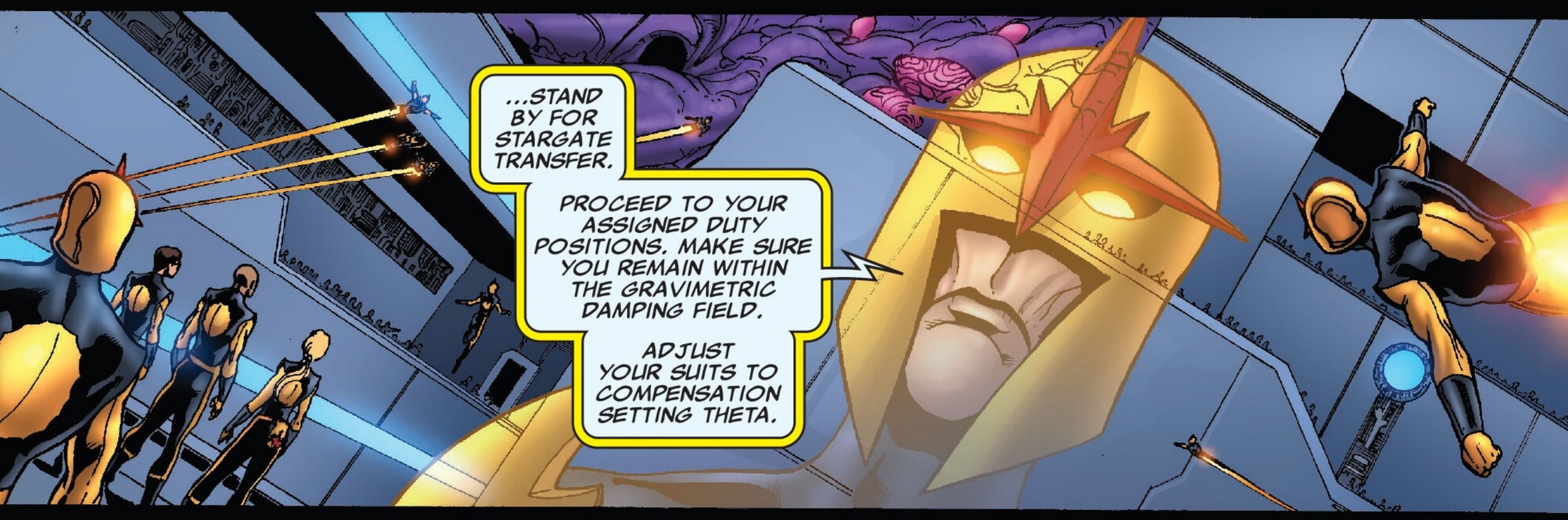
ABOUT THE FACT THAT YOU'RE *DYING*.

OH, THAT.
THERE'S NOT A LOT TO TALK ABOUT. I CARRIED THE NOVA FORCE AROUND IN ME FOR TOO LONG. NOW IT'S GONE, AND MY BODY CAN'T COPE.
MOLECULAR DECAY NECKER CALLED IT.
KABOOM! END OF STORY.
THERE MUST BE S--
NECKER AND DOC GRUENWALD ARE WORKING ON IT.
I GUESS THE ONLY PERSON IN THE UNIVERSE WHO MIGHT KNOW HOW TO FIX THINGS IS WORLDMIND AND--
WELL, THAT DOOR'S SHUT.
YOU SEE THIS? THIS IS SHERLOCK. ROBBIE BUILT THIS WHEN HE WAS--
RICH, I AM NOT JUST GOING TO STAND HERE AND WATCH YOU DIE!
SO STAND SOMEWHERE ELSE, WENDELL. THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO.
I WON'T ACCEPT THAT! WHAT IF--
OH.
WHAT?
THAT'S NOT RIGHT.
WENDELL? WHAT IS IT?
WENDELL?
DO YOU FEEL THAT?

FEEL WHAT? WENDELL, YOU'RE FREAKING ME--
POP
WENDELL? WENDELL?
BLUE BLAZES!
WHAT JUST HAPPENED?
DOCTOR NECKER? IT'S RICH. I'M DOWN AT THE BUNGALOWS. I THINK WENDELL JUST SUFFERED ANOTHER STRUCTURAL COLLAPSE AND--
DOCTOR?
THIS IS EVE NECKER. LEAVE A MESSAGE.
DAMMIT!
WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON TODAY?

NU-XANDAR, EARTH ORBIT.
NOVA CENTURIONS, IT IS CRITICAL YOU PAY ATTENTION AT THIS TIME.
SITUATION MONITORING REVIEW BEGINS. OPEN HOSTILITIES REGISTERED BETWEEN KREE EMPIRE AND SHI'AR IMPERIUM FORCES.
SIGNIFICANT CONFLICT REPORTED IN KREE OUTWORLDS AND GULF OF SARENTA.
MASS 8X8 DISTRESS SIGNALS DETECTED FROM KREE COLONIES RADIUS EIGHTEEN, 66 BETA TAU, AND CYBAL MAGNA.
EIGHTY-SEVEN FORMAL EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN DETECTED FROM NON-ALIGNED SOCIETIES IN THE FRONTIER ZONE.
NO RESPONSE FROM THE GALACTIC COUNCIL. MONITORING SUGGESTS THE GALACTIC COUNCIL HAS BEEN DISSOLVED.
UNCONFIRMED REPORTS SUGGEST THAT VIOLENT TRANSGRESSIONS OF STELLAR LAW HAVE BEEN COMMITTED AGAINST THE GALACTIC COUNCIL BY EMPEROR VULCAN OF THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM.
STAND BY FOR SUPPLEMENTARY UPDATES.
CENTURION COHORTS 126 AND 460 REPORT TO CENTRAL INFORMATION FOR DATAWARE UPGRADES.
COHORT 9. COHORT 9. BRIEFING IN FIVE MINUTES.
SO, A WAR HAS BROKEN OUT, RIGHT, TRE?
SEEMS SO, LINDY. THE SHI'AR AND THE KREE.
AND THAT'S BAD, RIGHT?


LINDY, UNTIL AN HOUR AGO I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT A KREE OR A SHI'AR WAS.
GOTTA LOVE THESE INFO-PATCHES. INSTANT EXPERTISE!
NOW I CAN EVEN TELL YOU WHO THE SIXTEENTH MAJESTOR OF THE SHI'AR WAS, AND HOW HIS POLICIES AFFECTED TERRITORIAL CLAIMS DURING THE SPARTOI INTERREGNUM.
YEAH, WELL, I GOT A PATCH TOO, BUT IT JUST FILLED MY HEAD WITH ALL THIS GARBAGE.
SERIOUSLY, THERE'S SO MUCH STUFF AND NONE OF IT'S USEFUL! MY BRAIN IS LITERALLY SWIMMING WITH JUNK DATA!
HEY, GUYS!
CENTURION RIDER.
PLEASE, IT'S ROBBIE, REMEMBER?
HOW ARE YOU TWO DOING?
ON OUR WAY TO ADVANCED TRAINING. WE'VE BEEN PICKED FOR SOME KIND OF SPECIAL THING.
YEAH, ADVANCED ZERO GRAVITY COMBAT TECHNIQUES.
ADVANCED ZEE-GEE-SEE? WICKED.
I'M HOPING TO GET THAT SPECIALTY TOO.
SO, RIGHT, WE'RE GOING TO FIGHT A WAR?
GONNA STOP ONE, I THINK.
YOU FEEL THAT? THAT LITTLE TREMOR LIKE AN EARTHQUAKE?
THE WORLDMIND'S SPENT THE LAST FEW HOURS SHIFTING NU-XANDAR'S ORBIT GETTING READY FOR DEPLOYMENT.
DEPLOYMENT? WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?
TRE, YOU'RE GOING TO LOVE THIS.
NOVA CENTURIONS...


...STAND BY FOR STARGATE TRANSFER.
PROCEED TO YOUR ASSIGNED DUTY POSITIONS. MAKE SURE YOU REMAIN WITHIN THE GRAVIMETRIC DAMPING FIELD.
ADJUST YOUR SUITS TO COMPENSATION SETTING THETA.

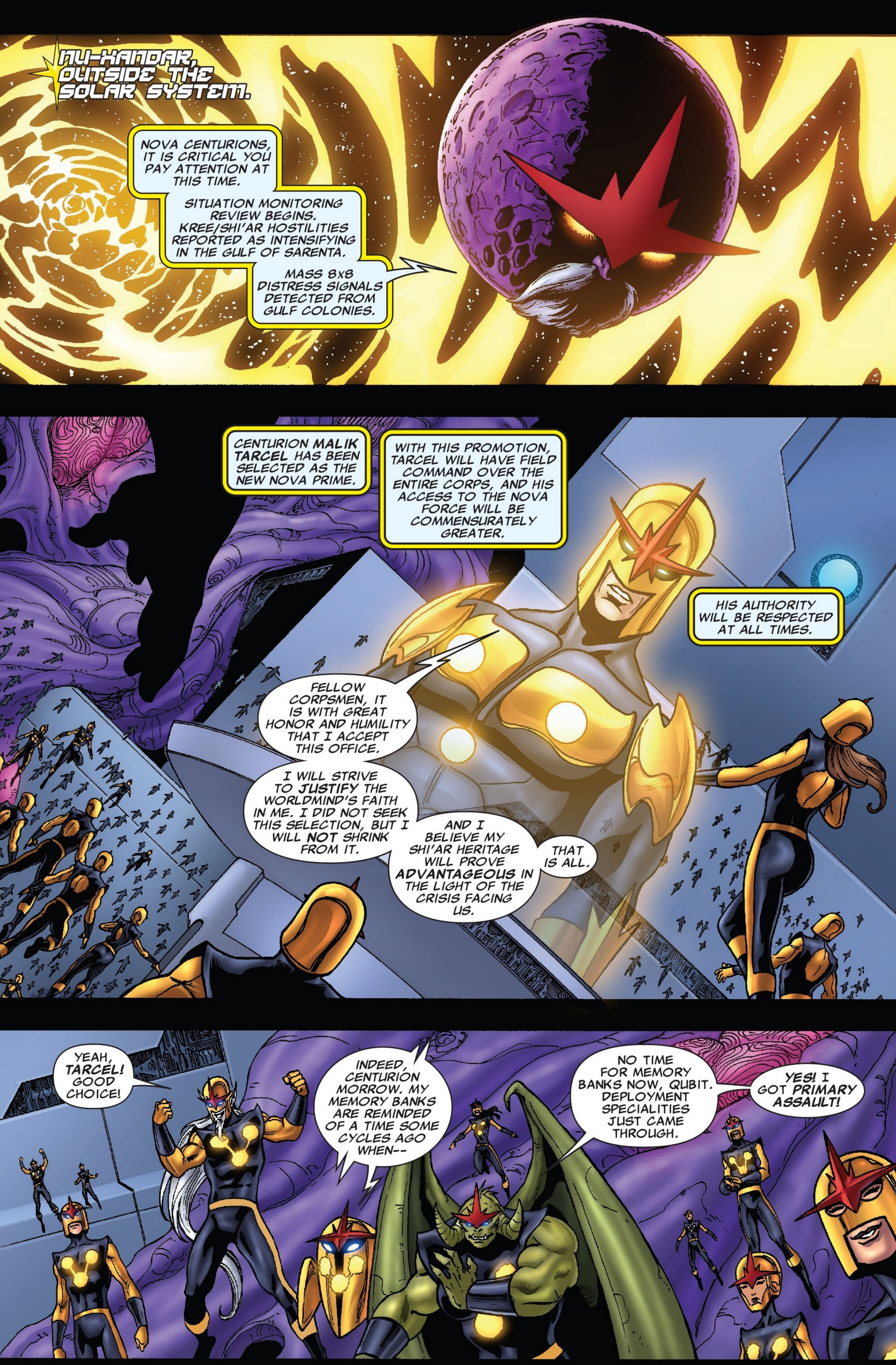
COURSE COMPUTED. STARGATE EXIT MATCH LOGGED. INITIATING ACCELERATION IN THREE...TWO...

FWOOOM!

P.E.G.A.S.U.S., UPSTATE NEW YORK.
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
THE P.E.G.A.S.U.S. FACILITY HAS BEEN SECURED.
BY WHO?
H.A.M.M.E.R.
WHO?
H.A.M.M.E.R.
WHAT HAPPENED TO S.H.I.E.L.D.?
WHO'S ASKING? LET'S SEE YOUR SWIPECARD.
SWIPE--? LISTEN, DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?
SON, ALL I KNOW IS THAT YOU'RE ON GOVERNMENT PROPERTY WITHOUT PROPER CLEARANCE.
CLIFF? HELP ME WITH THIS CUFF-AND-STUFF. I'VE GOT AN UNIDENTIFIED HOSTILE THAT NEEDS TO GO TO HOLDING.
WHOA, WHOA, I'M NOT--
IN SO DEEP YOU CAN'T EVEN SMELL IT?
WAKE UP. THERE'S A NEW SHERIFF IN TOWN AND YOU'RE IN TROUBLE. NOW, HANDS WHERE I CAN--
RICH? THERE YOU ARE! I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU!

OH...IS HE WITH YOU, DOCTOR NECKER?
MY BOYFRIEND HERE WAS SUPPOSED TO HELP WITH THESE BOXES, BUT HE GOT SLOWED DOWN BY THE STORM.
EVERYTHING OKAY, HONEY?
UH...
YEAH. I... YEAH. I GOT HELD UP IN THIS RAIN.
SORRY... HONEY.
NO PROBLEM. RIGHT, AGENT?
YES, MA'AM, AS LONG AS HE'S WITH YOU.
BUT IF YOU'RE LEAVING THE SITE I'LL NEED TO TAKE YOUR SWIPECARD.
MY PLEASURE...
...I WON'T BE COMING BACK.
WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON?
H.A.M.M.E.R.-- THEY'RE THE NEW U.S. SECURITY AGENCY THAT'S REPLACED S.H.I.E.L.D.-- CAME IN AND CLOSED P.E.G.A.S.U.S. DOWN AT EIGHT THIS MORNING.
GRUENWALD'S BEEN SUSPENDED. I WAS INFORMED MY CONTRACT WOULDN'T BE RENEWED.

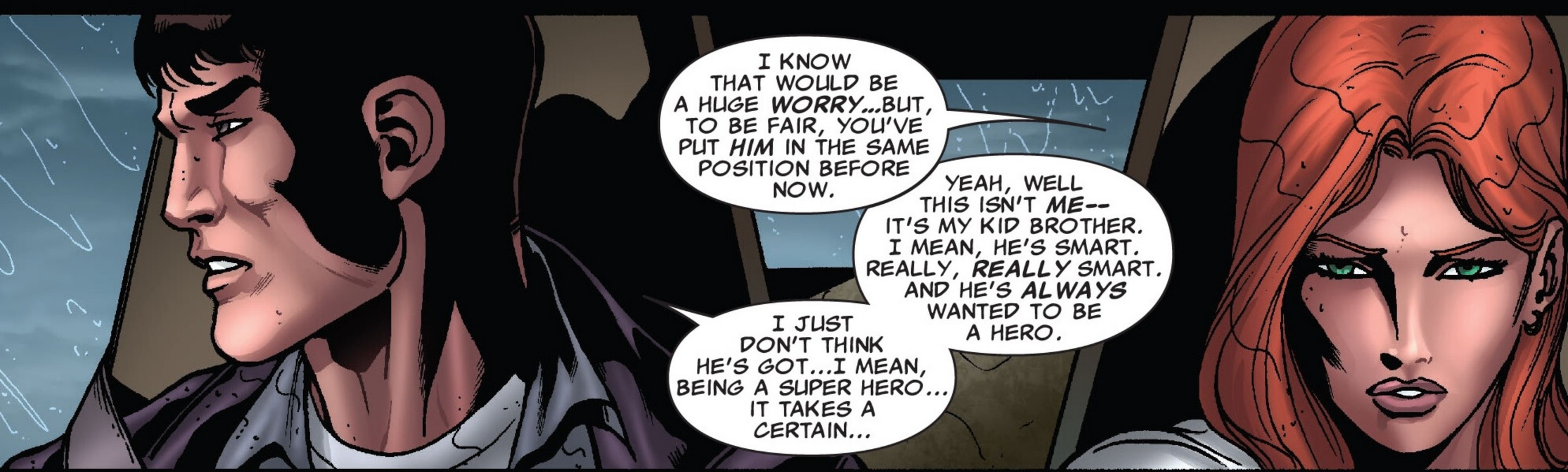
THIS IS ALL FALLOUT FROM THE SKRULL INVASION, ISN'T IT? SO TONY STARK IS...?
OUT. NORMAN OSBORN IS IN. THINGS ARE GOING TO BE DECIDEDLY CHILLY IN THE WORLD OF CLASSIFIED GOVERNMENT RESEARCH IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS.
GEEZ. WHAT'LL YOU DO?
I HAVE SOME CONTACTS. I'LL PROBABLY SWITCH TO CORPORATE RESEARCH. THAT'S WHERE THE MONEY IS.
SORRY ABOUT THE BOYFRIEND THING.
IF THOSE THUGS REALIZED YOU WERE NOVA, THEY'D HAVE BAGGED YOU FASTER THAN YOU COULD SAY "SUPERHUMAN REGISTRATION".
I APPRECIATE THE HELP.
WHAT'S WITH THIS FREAKY WEATHER?
KNOW WHAT?
OF COURSE. YOU WOULDN'T KNOW, WOULD YOU?
THE STORM IS A BYPRODUCT OF GRAVIMETRIC DISTURBANCES IN THE UPPER ATMOSPHERE.
YOUR PAL EGO VANISHED FROM ORBIT THIS MORNING.


NU-XANDAR, OUTSIDE THE SOLAR SYSTEM.
NOVA CENTURIONS, IT IS CRITICAL YOU PAY ATTENTION AT THIS TIME.
SITUATION MONITORING REVIEW BEGINS. KREE/SHI'AR HOSTILITIES REPORTED AS INTENSIFYING IN THE GULF OF SARENTA.
MASS 8X8 DISTRESS SIGNALS DETECTED FROM GULF COLONIES.
CENTURION MALIK TARCEL HAS BEEN SELECTED AS THE NEW NOVA PRIME.
WITH THIS PROMOTION, TARCEL WILL HAVE FIELD COMMAND OVER THE ENTIRE CORPS, AND HIS ACCESS TO THE NOVA FORCE WILL BE COMMENSURATELY GREATER.
HIS AUTHORITY WILL BE RESPECTED AT ALL TIMES.
FELLOW CORPSMEN, IT IS WITH GREAT HONOR AND HUMILITY THAT I ACCEPT THIS OFFICE.
I WILL STRIVE TO JUSTIFY THE WORLDMIND'S FAITH IN ME. I DID NOT SEEK THIS SELECTION, BUT I WILL NOT SHRINK FROM IT.
AND I BELIEVE MY SHI'AR HERITAGE WILL PROVE ADVANTAGEOUS IN THE LIGHT OF THE CRISIS FACING US.
THAT IS ALL.
YEAH, TARCEL! GOOD CHOICE!
INDEED, CENTURION MORROW. MY MEMORY BANKS ARE REMINDED OF A TIME SOME CYCLES AGO WHEN--
NO TIME FOR MEMORY BANKS NOW, QUBIT. DEPLOYMENT SPECIALITIES JUST CAME THROUGH.
YES! I GOT PRIMARY ASSAULT!

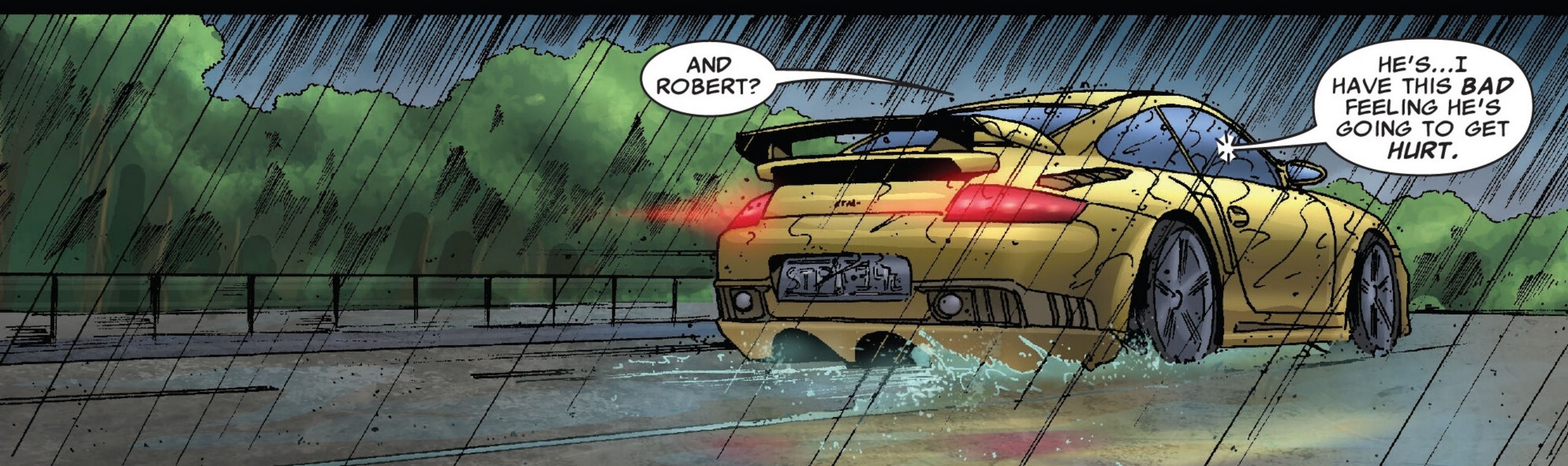
COULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED TO A NICER DRAGON LADY, FRAKTUR.
I GOT SYSTEM OPERATIONS. WHAT THE BLUE BLAZES IS THAT?
SO HAVE I. I BELIEVE IT'S THE STRATEGIC DIVISION.
STRATEGIC?
WORLDMIND! VERIFY SPECIALTY POSTING: RIDER, ROBERT.
POSTING VERIFIED, ROBERT. SELECTION PROFILING REVEALED YOU TO BE A PERFECT CANDIDATE FOR THE STRATEGIC SPECIALTY.
BUT IT'S NOT AT THE FRONT LINE! YOU WANT ME PLANNING TACTICS BACK HERE WHEN I SHOULD BE GETTING MY HANDS DIRTY!
STRATEGY IS A VITAL ROLE, ROBERT. IT IS AN HONOR--
STUFF THAT, IRANI! I DON'T WANT A DESK JOB! I WANT TO BE WHERE THE ACTION IS!
NOT THIS TIME, ROBERT. THE CORPS NEEDS YOUR EXPERTISE HERE. AND UNLIKE YOUR BROTHER, I KNOW YOU WILL RESPECT THE NEEDS OF THE CORPS.

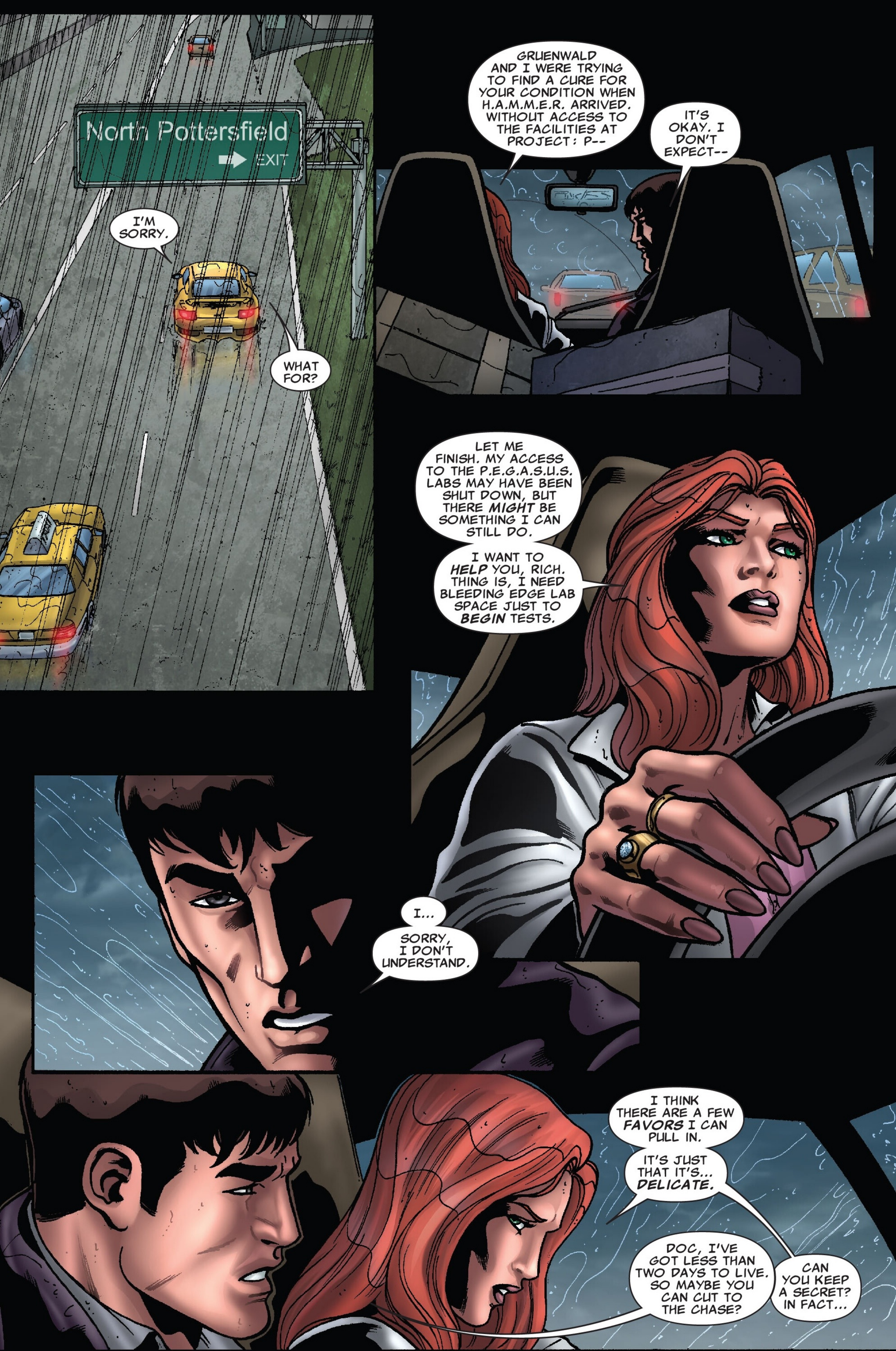
UPSTATE NEW YORK.
YOU STILL THINKING ABOUT YOUR BROTHER?

YEAH.
AS FAR AS I KNOW, HE'S HEADING AWAY FROM EARTH RIGHT NOW STRAIGHT INTO AN INTERSTELLAR BLOODBATH.


I KNOW THAT WOULD BE A HUGE WORRY...BUT, TO BE FAIR, YOU'VE PUT HIM IN THE SAME POSITION BEFORE NOW.
YEAH, WELL THIS ISN'T ME-- IT'S MY KID BROTHER. I MEAN, HE'S SMART. REALLY, REALLY SMART. AND HE'S ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A HERO.
I JUST DON'T THINK HE'S GOT...I MEAN, BEING A SUPER HERO... IT TAKES A CERTAIN...

COURAGE?
ARROGANCE.
WHICH YOU HAD IN SPADES?
DOCTOR, I WAS THE COCKIEST SON OF A SHLAG THIS SIDE OF ZETA RETICULA.


AND ROBERT?
HE'S...I HAVE THIS BAD FEELING HE'S GOING TO GET HURT.


North Pottersfield
EXIT
I'M SORRY.
WHAT FOR?
GRUENWALD AND I WERE TRYING TO FIND A CURE FOR YOUR CONDITION WHEN H.A.M.M.E.R. ARRIVED. WITHOUT ACCESS TO THE FACILITIES AT PROJECT: P--
IT'S OKAY. I DON'T EXPECT--
LET ME FINISH. MY ACCESS TO THE P.E.G.A.S.U.S. LABS MAY HAVE BEEN SHUT DOWN, BUT THERE *MIGHT* BE SOMETHING I CAN STILL DO.
I WANT TO *HELP* YOU, RICH. THING IS, I NEED BLEEDING EDGE LAB SPACE JUST TO *BEGIN* TESTS.
I...
SORRY, I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
I THINK THERE ARE A FEW *FAVORS* I CAN PULL IN.
IT'S JUST THAT IT'S... *DELICATE.*
DOC, I'VE GOT LESS THAN TWO DAYS TO LIVE. SO MAYBE YOU CAN CUT TO THE CHASE?
CAN YOU KEEP A SECRET? IN FACT...

DRIVE-IN
T CAM
OUT
F OM
SPACE
"...CAN YOU JUST NOT ASK ANY QUESTIONS AT ALL?"
WE'RE GOING TO THE MOVIES?
NO.
FKTT
DOCTOR NECKER... ARE YOU AN AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D.?

NO. I'M REALLY NOT.
WELL, THIS...
I MEAN...
OH... OKAY.
THE PEOPLE I... SOMETIMES WORK FOR, THEY...
...THEY'RE NOT USING THIS LOCATION AT THE MOMENT.
THERE ARE RESOURCES HERE I CAN USE. AMAZING TECH.
I'LL BET.
WHAT?
I...WOW. I'M REALLY UNCOMFORTABLE.
I'M TOUCHED THAT YOU'D REVEAL SO MUCH JUST TO HELP ME, BUT...
THE PEOPLE YOU... SOMETIMES WORK FOR--A.I.M.--THEY'RE TERRORISTS. THEY KILL PEOPLE.

OH, THAT'S A COMMON MISCONCEPTION. THEY'RE NOT. SERIOUSLY. IT'S ABOUT WORKING FOR A BETTER WORLD, WHERE SCIENCE LEADS RATHER THAN RELIGION OR--
DON'T TRY AND SELL ME THAT.
THAT PART DOESN'T MATTER ANYWAY! I CAN HELP YOU. I WANT TO HELP YOU. IT'S OKAY FOR ME TO DO THIS.
I BELIEVE YOU. I BELIEVE YOU'RE TRYING TO HELP.
BUT IT'S NOT OKAY. A.I.M. WILL WANT SOMETHING IN RETURN.
NO! IT'S NOT LIKE THAT. THERE'D BE NO STRINGS ATTACHED!
I CAN'T. NOT EVEN TO SAVE MY OWN LIFE.
I CAN'T GET IN BED WITH THESE PEOPLE.
"GET IN BED?"
YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN. THANK YOU, DOCTOR. I'LL PASS.
BESIDES, QUASAR SAID HE'D HELP ME.
BUT HE VANISHED! YOU SAID HE JUST DISAPPEARED! YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW IF HE'S COMING BACK!
EVEN SO. I REALLY CAN'T DO THIS.
BUT THANKS FOR TRYING, DOCTOR.
RICHARD! WAIT!

GO BACK INSIDE, DOCTOR.

LISTEN TO ME. I FIND YOUR BOY SCOUT PRINCIPLES FRUSTRATING, BUT I UNDERSTAND.

IT'S JUST HOW ROBERT USED TO DESCRIBE YOU.

IF YOU WON'T ACCEPT ANY HELP FROM ME, THEN AT LEAST ACCEPT THIS.

IT'S THE QUANTUM FLASK. IT'S QUASAR'S QUANTUM FLASK.

I SNUCK IT OUT OF P.E.G.A.S.U.S. UNDER H.A.M.M.E.R.'S NOSE. I WAS GOING TO GIVE IT TO...THE PEOPLE I SOMETIMES WORK FOR.

IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A CONSOLATION PRIZE TO MAKE UP FOR THE FACT THAT THEY'D LOST THEIR MOLE INSIDE P.E.G.A.S.U.S.

PLEASE, JUST TAKE IT.

THANK YOU, DOCTOR NECKER.

EVE. IT'S EVE.

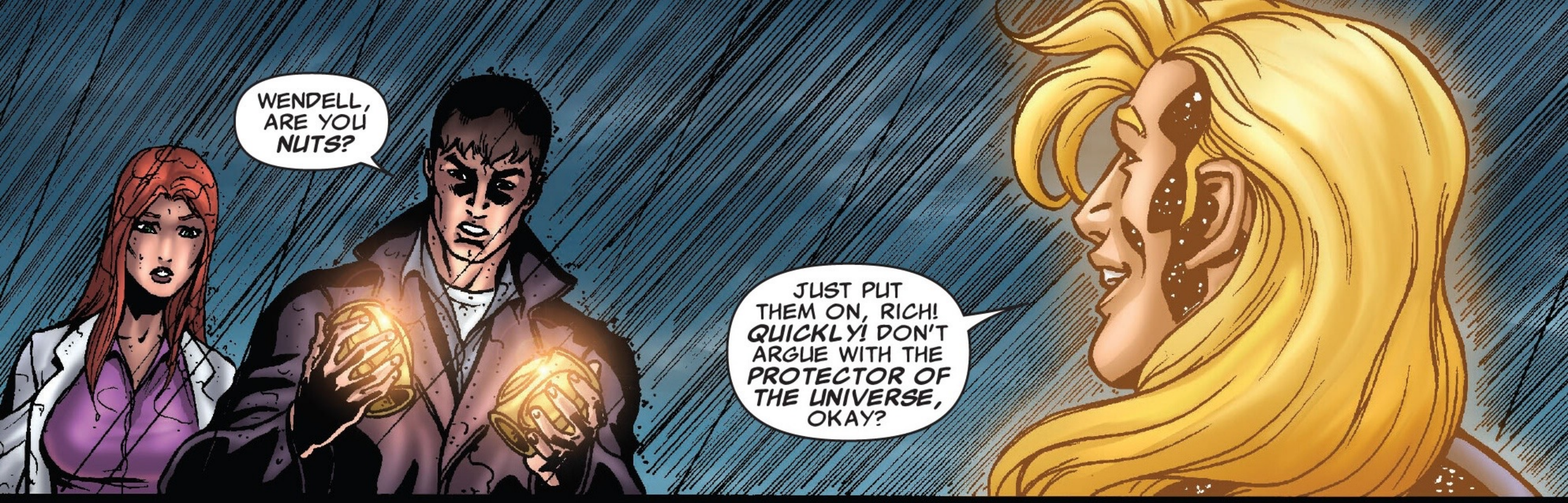
THANK YOU, EVE.
WAIT! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
I REALLY APPRECIATE YOU GIVING ME THIS, BUT I MAY NOT BE ALIVE TOMORROW.
I CAN'T RISK IT FALLING INTO THE HANDS OF YOUR ASSOCIATES.
NO! NO!
I MEANT IT FOR YOU! I--
YEOWW!
KATSSHH

RICH! I GOT THEM BACK!

PHYLA MAR-VELL, WHO WAS WEARING THEM, WAS ***DEAD***, YOU SEE, EXCEPT SHE ***WASN'T***, BUT ANYWAY ***THAT*** WAS WHY I GOT ***SUMMONED*** LIKE THAT! ***SUMMONED!*** AND JUST LIKE ***THAT***, I WAS ***THERE***, AND--

QUASAR! WHAT THE ***BLUE BLAZES?!*** SLOW ***DOWN***, MAN! YOU'RE ***BABBLING!****

*** TO FIND OUT WHAT WENDELL IS BABBLING ABOUT, SEE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY #11 & #12...ON SALE RIGHT NOW! --BILL THE LIVING EDITOR.**


WENDELL, ARE YOU NUTS?
JUST PUT THEM ON, RICH! QUICKLY! DON'T ARGUE WITH THE PROTECTOR OF THE UNIVERSE, OKAY?

FWASS-ZOOM

OH. MY. GOD.

OKAY. THIS IS NEW...

NOVA 24

THE GULF OF SARENTA, KREE TERRITORY. HOUR 103 OF THE KREE-SHIAR WAR.

OH DEAR ME.

CAN I JUST MENTION THAT THIS IS A LITTLE *SCARY?*

SUKI? CENTURION SUKI YUMIKO? IS THAT YOU?

YES! *SORRY!* I SHOULDN'T BE CHATTERING!

IS THAT *YOU*, ROBERT?

WHY, YES IT IS....

SYSTEM OPERATIONS, NU-XANDAR.

...CENTURION *ROBBIE RIDER* SPEAKING DIRECTLY TO YOUR HEAD FROM SYSTEM OPERATIONS.

THINK OF ME AS YOUR *GUY IN THE SKY.*

IT'S GOOD TO HEAR YOUR VOICE, ROBBIE...

...I MUST CONFESS, I WOULD *REALLY* RATHER BE WHERE YOU ARE.

WELL, I'D LOVE TO BE WHERE *YOU* ARE, SUKI.

I DON'T THINK YOU WOULD, ROBBIE-SAN.

I WOULD! I WOULD! SERIOUSLY...

...YOU'RE TALKING TO A GUY WHO WAS GIVEN A *DESK JOB* FOR THE DURATION OF THIS WAR.

I WOULD GIVE *REAL MONEY* TO BE AT THE FRONTLINE WITH YOU.

SYSTEM OPERATIONS OVERSEES OUR TACTICS, ROBBIE-SAN. IT IS A VITAL AND *HONORABLE* DUTY.

THIS I KEEP HEARING.

ANYWAY, SUKI, HOW ABOUT YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU CAN SEE FROM WHERE *YOU* ARE?

WELL...

THIS WORLD & THE NEXT
...EVERYTHING? AND NONE OF IT MAKES ANY SENSE.

CENTURION YUMIKO'S ADRENAL-STRESS LEVELS ARE SPIKING *EXCESSIVELY*. YOU SHOULD ADJUST--

I *KNOW* WHAT TO DO, IRANI. BUT THANKS.

A LITTLE ENDORPHIN BOOST SHOULD HELP HER.

CENTURION YUMIKO IS EXECUTING A POWER-DIVE ASSAULT FROM ORBIT ONTO A KREE REFINERY PLANETOID WITH NOVA PRIME TARCEL AND THE REST OF COHORT 86, SO IT'S NO SMALL WONDER SHE'S A LITTLE TENSE.

MY MEMORY BANKS RECALL MY FIRST--

SHE'S *REALLY* SCARED, QUBIT. THINK I'LL LEAVE THE LINK OPEN SO I CAN REASSURE HER.

WE ARE SYSTEM OPERATIONS, ROBERT. OUR ROLE IS TACTICAL ANALYSIS, NOT *PERSONAL COACHING.*

MAINTAINING A ONE-TO-ONE CONTACT WITH CENTURION YUMIKO DURING OPERATIONAL DEPLOYMENT IS NOT--

LOOK AT MY FACE, IRANI.

I'M TRYING TO *HELP* HER.

THE FACT THAT SHE'S CUTE IS OBVIOUSLY JUST A BONUS.

SHE'S *SCARED*, QUBIT!

SUKI? CAN YOU STILL HEAR ME?

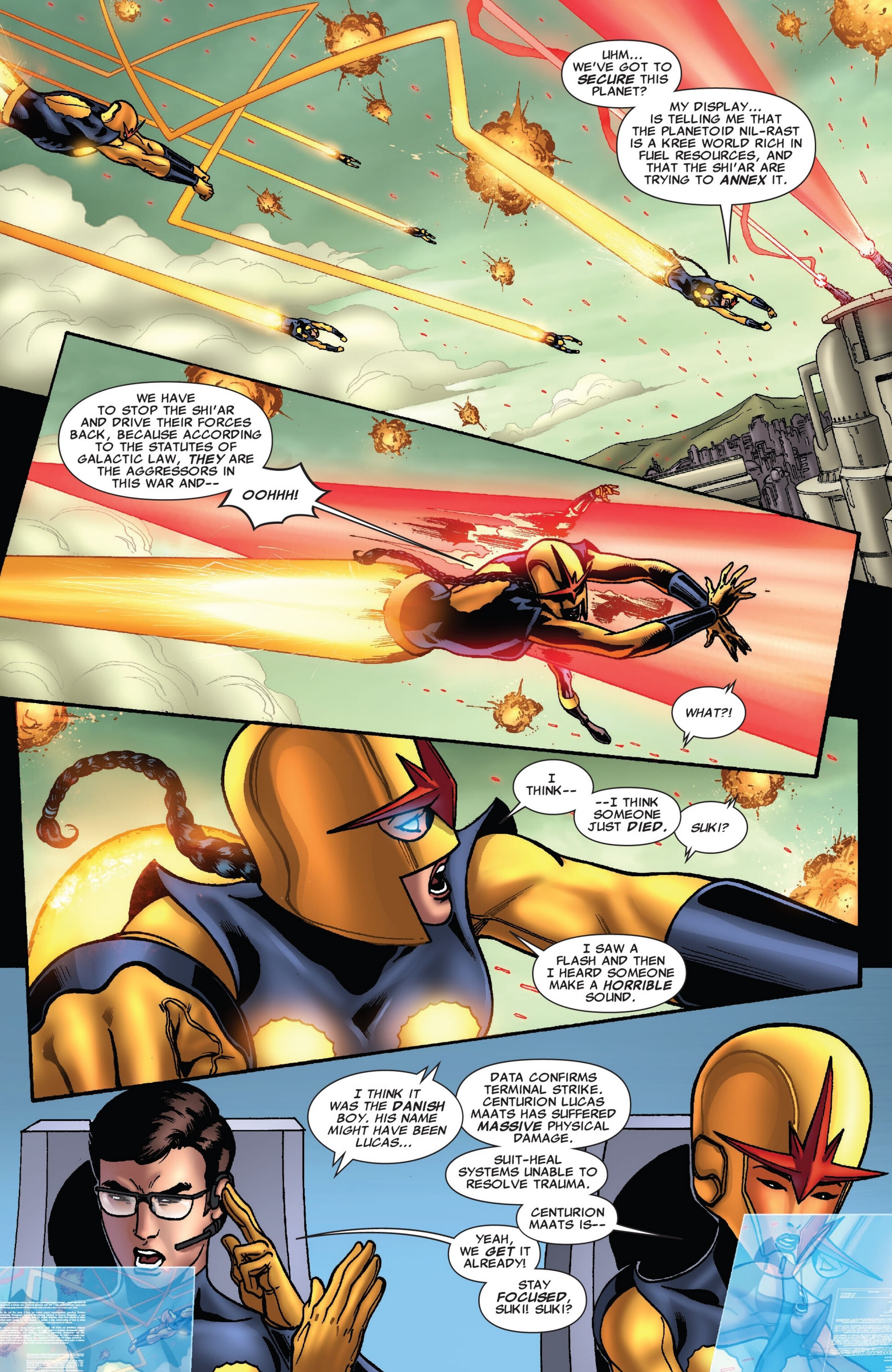
OF COURSE.

I'M LEAVING THIS LINK OPEN SO YOU CAN CHAT TO ME.

SUKI, YOU NEED TO UPLOAD THE TACTICAL FEED TO YOUR *HEADS-UP DISPLAY.* THAT'LL GIVE YOU A CLEARER PICTURE OF WHAT'S GOING ON.

O-OKAY.

YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR *OBJECTIVES*, RIGHT?


UHM... WE'VE GOT TO SECURE THIS PLANET?
MY DISPLAY... IS TELLING ME THAT THE PLANETOID NIL-RAST IS A KREE WORLD RICH IN FUEL RESOURCES, AND THAT THE SHI'AR ARE TRYING TO ANNEX IT.
WE HAVE TO STOP THE SHI'AR AND DRIVE THEIR FORCES BACK, BECAUSE ACCORDING TO THE STATUTES OF GALACTIC LAW, THEY ARE THE AGGRESSORS IN THIS WAR AND--
OOHHH!
WHAT?!
I THINK--
--I THINK SOMEONE JUST DIED.
SUKI?
I SAW A FLASH AND THEN I HEARD SOMEONE MAKE A HORRIBLE SOUND.
I THINK IT WAS THE DANISH BOY. HIS NAME MIGHT HAVE BEEN LUCAS...
DATA CONFIRMS TERMINAL STRIKE. CENTURION LUCAS MAATS HAS SUFFERED MASSIVE PHYSICAL DAMAGE.
SUIT-HEAL SYSTEMS UNABLE TO RESOLVE TRAUMA.
CENTURION MAATS IS--
YEAH, WE GET IT ALREADY!
STAY FOCUSED, SUKI! SUKI?

AHHH!
SUKI? SUKI?!
YOU ALL RIGHT THERE, CENTURION YUMIKO?
Y-YES, NOVA PRIME TARCEL.
GOOD.
COHORT 86, WE'RE GOING TO HIT THAT PROCESSOR.
UPLOAD INSERT TRAJECTORIES TO YOUR VISOR. DOUBLE GRAVIMETRIC SHIELDS. FOLLOW ME IN.

OH DEAR ME.
THEY'RE HITTING PROCESSOR EIGHT-ALPHA.
CONFIRMED. MOVING SUPPORT COHORTS 14 AND 36 AROUND TO THE RIGHT FLANK TO BLOCK SHI'AR COUNTER-STRIKE.
MAN...
SOMETIMES I THINK RICH MAY HAVE HAD A POINT...
HOW SO, ROBERT?
WE'RE HOLDING THEIR HANDS, QUBIT. WE'RE SPOON-FEEDING TACTICAL ADVICE AND STRATEGIES TO THEM.
NONE OF THEM HAVE ANY EXPERIENCE OR ANY SERIOUS TRAINING HOURS UNDER THEIR BELTS.
WE'VE JUST THROWN THEM IN THE DEEP END.
GOD...
"...I WISH I WAS THERE."
PRIME-SAN!

THANK YOU, CENTURION YUMIKO. I HAD NOT SEEN THAT ONE.
SWEET SHOOTING, SUKI! MAN, THIS IS JUST LIKE HALO III, RIGHT?
I SUPPOSE, CENTURION ATWATER...
I-I JUST KILLED SOMEONE.
CALL ME JOSH, OKAY? THIS IS THE COOLEST! TROUBLE IS, AFTER THIS THE GRAPHICS ON MY X-BOX ARE GOING TO SEEM SO SUCKY!
YOU REALIZE THESE ARE REAL PEOPLE WE'RE SHOOTING, DON'T YOU?
WHAT? SURE!
DO NOT FEEL REMORSE, CENTURION YUMIKO.
THESE SHI'AR ARE WORTHLESS FOOLS. THEY HAVE SWORN ALLEGIANCE TO THE TRAITOR VULCAN.
THEY HAVE NO HONOR AND DESERVE NO PITY!
"THEY HAVE NO HO-NOR!" WHOO, DUDE, SOUNDS LIKE CHOW YUN FAT!
NOVA PRIME...
...AREN'T YOU A SHI'AR YOURSELF? I TAKE IT YOU DO NOT--
VULCAN IS AN USURPER AND A MADMAN. A HUMAN PRETENDING TO BE SHI'AR.
LILANDRA NERAMANI WOULD NEVER HAVE TAKEN MY PEOPLE INTO THIS WAR.
I SEE. I'M SORRY, BUT I DON'T REALLY KNOW WHO YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT. I--

SPLIT LEFT! HIT THOSE GUNPORTS WITH SOME TIGHT-FOCUS SHOTS!
ON IT, NOVA PRIME!
INCOMING HEAVY FIRE FROM THE ASSEMBLY TOWERS!
ROBBIE-SAN? ARE YOU STILL THERE?
ABSOLUTELY. YOU STILL IN ONE PIECE?
I BELIEVE SO. I CAN'T REALLY TELL. I CAN'T EVEN TELL IF WE'RE WINNING.
ARE WE WINNING, ROBBIE?
OH YEAH. THANKS TO TARCEL'S NO NONSENSE FRONTAL ATTACK, YOU'VE SLAMMED THE SHI'AR GROUND FORCES RIGHT OUT OF POSITION.
DATA SUGGESTS SHI'AR ELEMENTS ARE BEGINNING TO EVAC FROM THE SURFACE. THE WITHDRAWAL LOOKS PIECEMEAL... FRANTIC...
I THINK THEY'RE RUNNING.
HEAR THAT, SUKI? IT'S OFFICIAL. THE NOVA CORPS HAS TAKEN NIL-RAST AND--
--WAIT.
WHAT'S THAT? WHAT IS THAT?
IRANI! DETECTORS ARE PAINTING SOMETHING ON GRID FIVE-EIGHT-ZERO!
CONTACT IDENTIFIED AS THE ENERGY SIGNATURE OF A MASS-SCALE TELEPORT BEAM.
OH MY GOD. OH MY GOD.

"IT'S THE SHI'AR IMPERIAL GUARD!"

ZAROS SYSTEM, EIGHTEEN PARSECS FROM THE KREE FRONTIER.
OKAY, LET'S DO THIS.
I'LL BE WITH YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY, RICHARD.
I WISH I COULD BE OF MORE ACTUAL HELP TO YOU. WHILE YOU'VE GOT THE BANDS, I'M NOT GOING TO BE MUCH MORE THAN A GHOSTLY CO-PILOT WHO CAN WHISPER IN YOUR EAR.
WENDELL, YOU'VE DONE MORE THAN ENOUGH FOR ME ALREADY!
THE QUANTUM BANDS AREN'T THE SORT OF THING YOU JUST LEND OUT TO ANYBODY.
YOU'RE NOT ANYBODY. BESIDES, THE BANDS ARE THE ONLY THINGS KEEPING YOU ALIVE WITHOUT THE NOVA FORCE.
STOP THANKING ME! THAT'S THE FIFTEENTH TIME YOU'VE TRIED TO THANK ME SINCE WE LEFT EARTH!
WELL, THA--
I NEED TO THANK YOU. I OWE MY LIFE TO YOU AND DOCTOR NECKER.
I HOPE SHE'S FORGIVEN ME FOR RUSHING OFF LIKE THAT.

SHE UNDERSTANDS. YOU HAD TO GET AFTER EGO.
SPEAKING OF WHICH, IT LOOKS LIKE "NU-XANDAR" HAS STOPPED HERE AT ZAROS THREE FOR ANOTHER "RECRUITING DRIVE."
THAT'S GOT TO BE TEN, TWELVE THOUSAND NATIVE ZAROSIANS IT'S TAKING ON BOARD.
FRESH MEAT.
SO, COME ON, GHOSTLY CO-PILOT...
YOU KNOW THE QUANTUM POWERS BETTER THAN ANYONE--AND YOU'VE TANGLED WITH EGO BEFORE...SO HOW DO WE STORM A LIVING PLANET?
TRICKY.
EGO HAS A COSMIC AWARENESS GREATER THAN MINE, RICH. THERE'S NO WAY HE WON'T SEE YOU COMING.
SO...
IF HE'S GOING TO SEE THE PROTECTOR OF THE UNIVERSE HEADING AT HIM ANYWAY...

...LET'S MAKE HIM WONDER *WHICH ONE* TO HIT FIRST.

NIL-RAST.
COMBAT SPREAD.
CLEAN HOUSE.
SHI'AR AGGRESSOR! UNDER THE TERMS OF NOVA CORPS PAN-WORLDS JURISDICTION TREATY, YOU MUST STAND DOWN OR SUFFER IM--
UHHKKK--
I WANT THE FACILOIDS SECURE IN THE NEXT SIXTY MINUTES.
YES, PRAETOR!
AHGHHH!

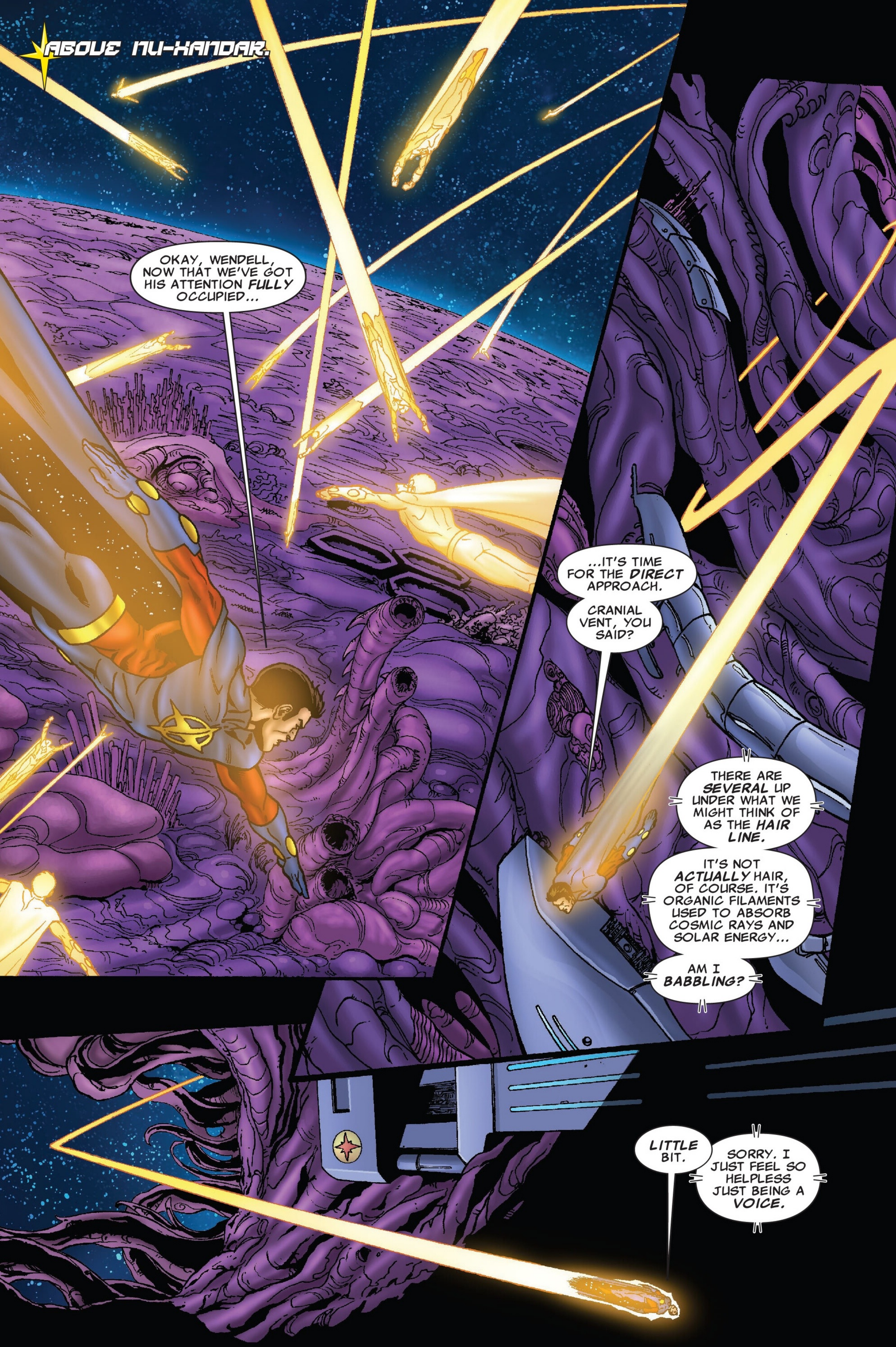
YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE MESSED WITH THE IMPERIAL GUARD, XANDARIAN!
UGHN!
I RECOMMEND YOU SURRENDER.
NEVER GOING TO HAPPEN.

YOU'RE SHI'AR!
HOW ARE YOU ON THE WRONG SIDE?
I COULD ASK THE SAME OF YOU!
I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF EMPEROR VULCAN.
UGHH!
TELL YOUR PEOPLE TO SURRENDER.
N-NEVER!
I GAVE YOU THE OPTION. DON'T BLAME ME FOR WHAT HAPPENS N--
OW.

OH... OH, DEAR ME.
SUKI? SUKI, WHAT'S HAPPENING?
CENTURION YUMIKO, IT IS CRITICAL THAT YOU RESPOND AT THIS TIME!
UGHHHG! NOVA PRIME! NOVA PRIME!
LAST CHANCE. TELL YOUR PEOPLE TO SURRENDER, OR YOU WILL BE ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE LIVES LOST.
GKK... GKKK...
NOW.
SIGNALS FROM NIL-RAST. THREE COHORTS... CORRECTION, FIVE COHORTS HAVE...SURRENDERED TO THE SHI'AR IMPERIAL GUARD.
BLUE BLAZES!
THE GUARD JUST WIPED THE FLOOR WITH US!
SUKI? CAN YOU HEAR ME? SUKI?!
ROBBIE-SAN. N-NOVA PRIME TARCEL HAS BEEN FORCED TO SURRENDER.
THEY WERE GOING TO KILL HIM. KILL ALL OF US.

THEY ARE SO...SO RUTHLESS. THEY BEAT US LIKE CHILDREN.
WE'LL BE OKAY, SUKI...
WE'LL BE OKAY, RIGHT?
I DON'T KNOW, JOSH.
I SEE THE FUN'S OVER, GLADIATOR.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, STRONTIAN?
THE EMPEROR ORDERED ME AND MY PRAETORIANS IN TO TAKE COMMAND OF THIS THEATER OF OPERATIONS.
HE WANTS YOU BACK AT THE FLAGSHIP WITHOUT DELAY. HE WANTS YOU PRESENT WHEN HE GREETS LILANDRA NERAMANI.
VERY WELL.
SECURE THESE PRISONERS. I'M TAKING THIS ONE BACK FOR INTERROGATION.
THE NOVA PRIME? AND HE'S A SHI'AR.
THE IMPERIAL TORTURERS WILL HAVE A FIELD DA--
BYE-BYE, KALLARK.

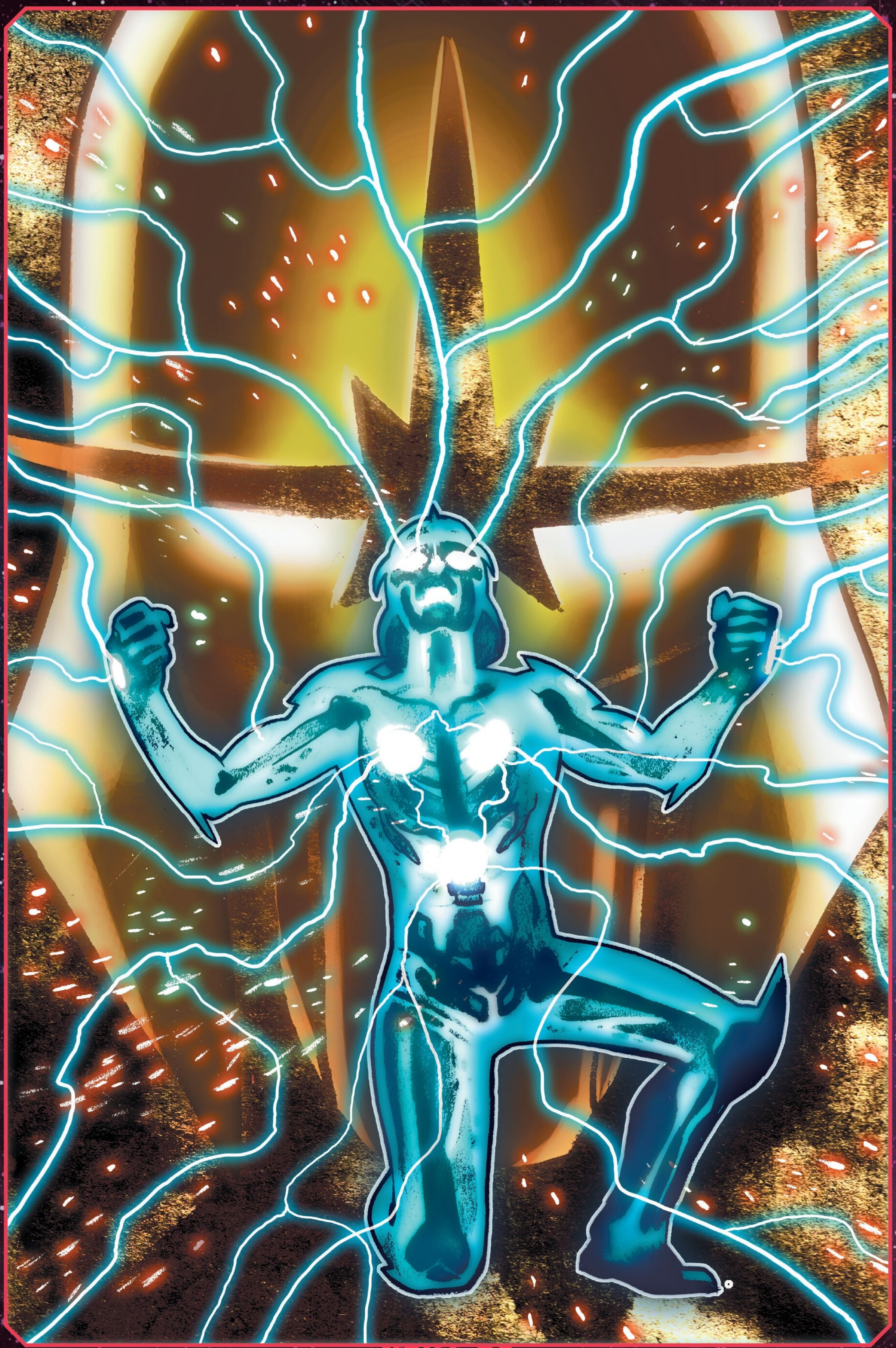
WHAT SHOULD WE DO WITH THE PRISONERS, STRONTIAN?
WHAT PRISONERS?
ALL I SEE ARE PRACTICE TARGETS.
O-OH DEAR M--
SUKI? SUKI, WHAT'S HAPPENING?
SUKI?
I'M REGISTERING...
OH.
THAT CAN'T BE RIGHT.
THE INDIVIDUAL VITAL TRACES FOR THE MEMBERS OF COHORT 86 HAVE DISAPPEARED.
THEY'RE DEAD.
THEY'RE ALL DEAD.
PRIME ALERT -- KIA


ABOVE NU-XANDAR.
OKAY, WENDELL, NOW THAT WE'VE GOT HIS ATTENTION FULLY OCCUPIED...
...IT'S TIME FOR THE DIRECT APPROACH.
CRANIAL VENT, YOU SAID?
THERE ARE SEVERAL UP UNDER WHAT WE MIGHT THINK OF AS THE HAIR LINE.
IT'S NOT ACTUALLY HAIR, OF COURSE. IT'S ORGANIC FILAMENTS USED TO ABSORB COSMIC RAYS AND SOLAR ENERGY...
AM I BABBLING?
LITTLE BIT.
SORRY. I JUST FEEL SO HELPLESS JUST BEING A VOICE.

HOLD TIGHT.
WE'RE IN...
...AND THIS HAS GOT TO BE IT...

...IS THERE ANY OTHER WAY OF PUTTING IT APART FROM 'EGO'S BRAIN'?
NO, THAT'S PRETTY MUCH WHAT THIS IS.
THIS IS THE CEREBRAL MATRIX THAT THE WORLDMIND HAS LOADED ITSELF INTO AND TAKEN OVER.
WE'D BETTER--
WAIT! OH MY GOD! WORLDMIND, ARE YOU...
...EGO?
LIFE IS FULL OF SURPRISES, RICHARD RIDER...

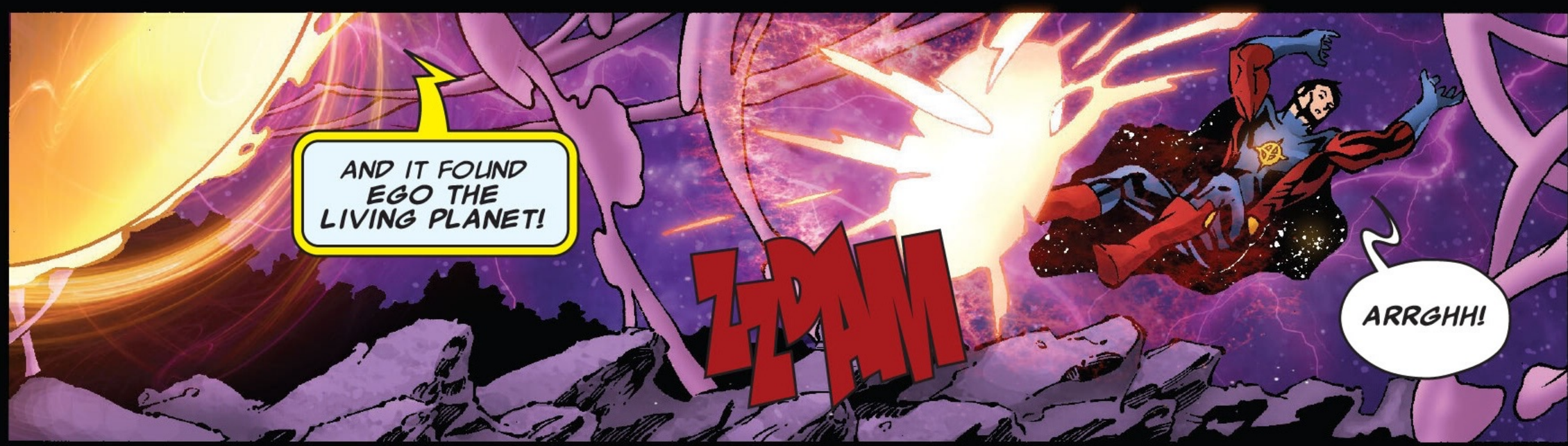
...LIFE IS ALSO VERY SHORT.
EAAARRGHH!



NOVA 25

CEREBRAL MATRIX, NU-XANDAR.
WORLDMIND?! NYAAAHHH!
WORLDMIND, CAN YOU HEAR ME? ARE YOU IN THERE?
IT'S ME! IT'S RICHARD!
EMPIRE OF THE MIND

IS THERE ANY SHRED OF YOU LEFT I CAN REACH?
BLUE BLAZES, WORLDMIND! IT'S CRITICAL YOU PAY ATTENTION AT THIS TIME!
IS THERE ANY PART OF YOU THAT EGO HASN'T INVADED?
YOUR PREMISE IS FALSE, RICHARD RIDER.
THERE IS NO WORLDMIND.
THERE IS NO EGO.
THERE IS ONLY BOTH.
EAARRGHH!
ZZAKOWW
WHAT IS THIS?
I THOUGHT YOU'D GONE NUTSO, WORLDMIND! I THOUGHT YOU'D TURNED ON ME!
BUT IT WAS EGO ALL THE TIME, WASN'T IT?
EGO IS WORLDMIND IS EGO. THERE IS ONLY BOTH.
SCARRED AND DAMAGED BY THE SCOURGING WRATH OF THE GREAT DEVOURER GALACTUS,* THE XANADARIAN WORLDMIND REACHED OUT...
...TO FIND A HOME! AN ALLY! A PROTECTOR!
*IN NOVA #15. --BACK-ISSUE BILL.


AND IT FOUND EGO THE LIVING PLANET!
ZZPAAM
ARRGHH!

AND EGO BECAME WORLDMIND BECAME EGO! MUTUAL SUPPORT! MUTUAL BENEFIT! MUTUAL SECURITY!
MUTUAL CRAZINESS!
WORLDMIND! MMHHN! LISTEN TO ME! EGO'S INSIDE YOU! HE'S CORRUPTED YOUR CEREBRAL PATHWAYS AND DRIVEN YOU INSANE!

INCORRECT, RICHARD RIDER.
THERE IS NO WORLDMIND.
THERE IS NO EGO.

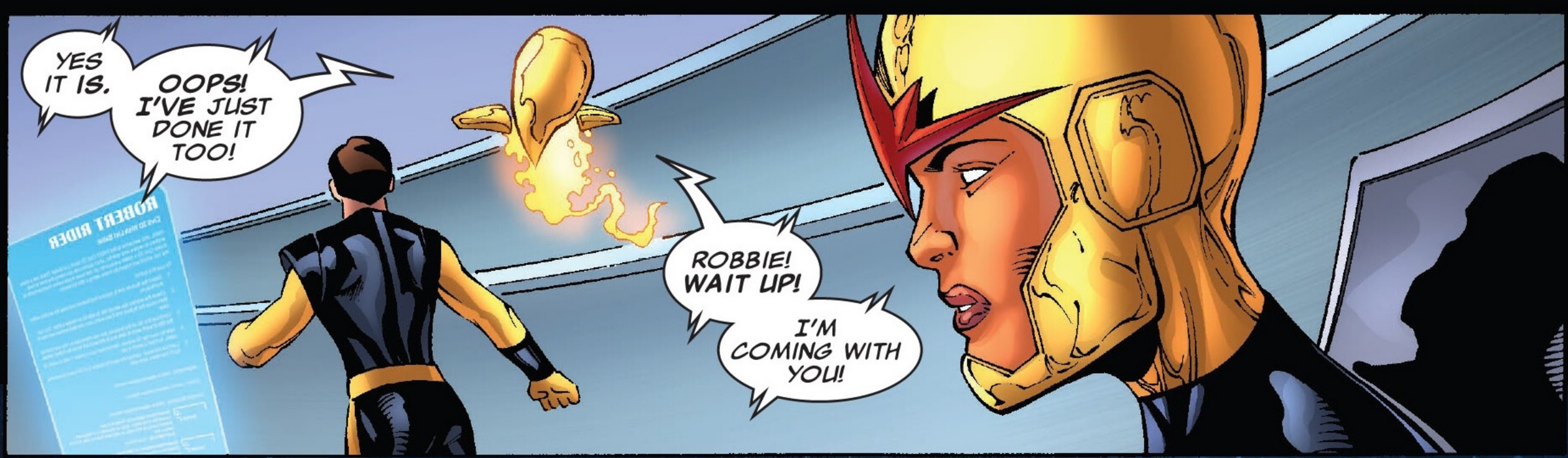
THERE IS ONLY BOTH.
NNEARGH!
ZZKABOOM
"DID YOU HEAR THAT?"

SYSTEM OPERATIONS, NU-XANDAR.
HEAR WHAT, ROBERT?
SCREAMING? SOMEONE SCREAMING?
I HEARD NOTHING.
I THINK YOU MAY BE IN SHOCK, CENTURION RIDER.
THE TRAGIC FATE OF COHORT 86 AND THE NOVA PRIME HAS STUNNED US ALL.
WHY, MY MEMORY BANKS STRUGGLE TO FIND A PRECEDENT F--
IT WASN'T A "TRAGIC FATE", QUBIT! IT WAS MURDER!
NOVA PRIME TARCEL HAD SURRENDERED COHORT 86 TO THE SHI'AR IMPERIAL GUARD TO PREVENT FURTHER BLOODSHED--AND THE IMPERIAL GUARD SLAUGHTERED THEM!
OH GOD. SUKI...
SHE MUST HAVE BEEN SO SCARED.
I NEED TO SPEAK TO THE WORLDMIND. WE'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS!
THE WORLDMIND HAS BEEN IN SEALED CONTEMPLATION FOR THE LAST SEVEN MINUTES.
HIS INNER CORTICAL CHAMBERS ARE LOCKED. NO ONE IS TO BE ADMITTED.
WHAT THE BLUE BLAZES ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, IRANI? SINCE WHEN DID THE WORLDMIND SHUT HIMSELF AWAY?

SINCE SEVEN POINT TWO MINUTES AGO, WH--
THE WORLDMIND'S JUST GOING TO IGNORE THIS?
GONNA SHUT HIS EYES?
I HARDLY THINK--
OH, GOD, WHAT IF RICH WAS RIGHT? IF WORLDMIND'S PULLED THE CORPS TOGETHER TOO FAST, THOUSANDS OF INNOCENT LIVES ARE GOING TO BE WASTED!

CENTURION RIDER! WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING?
NIL-RAST! IF ANYONE FROM COHORT 86 HAS SURVIVED, THEY'LL BE IN DESPERATE NEED OF HELP!
BUT, ROBERT, YOU ARE NOT AUTHORIZED FOR COMBAT ZONE DEPLOYMENT!

GUESS AGAIN, IRANI! WE'RE SYSTEM OPERATIONS, REMEMBER?
WE GET TO DECIDE WHO GETS POSTED WHERE, AND I JUST WROTE MYSELF SOME ORDERS!
THAT... THAT'S JUST WRONG!


YES IT IS.
OOPS! I'VE JUST DONE IT TOO!
ROBBIE! WAIT UP!
I'M COMING WITH YOU!

OKAY... WHAT'S THE PLAN?
I DON'T HAVE ONE, QUBIT. NOT YET.
WE JUST DO WHATEVER WE CAN...

"...OR AN *AWFUL* LOT MORE PEOPLE ARE GOING TO SUFFER."

STATE YOUR NAME.

IMPERIAL SHI'AR FLAGSHIP HAMMER II.

YOU *REALIZE* YOU WILL BE PARADED BEFORE THE POPULACE ON CHANDILAR?

A TROPHY OF *WAR.* AN OBJECT OF *SCORN.* THE MIGHTY *NOVA PRIME* IN CHAINS.

AND A *SHI'AR BORN* TO BOOT. SUCH *INFAMY.*

DETENTION DECK.

SO I ASK AGAIN...STATE YOUR NAME.

YOU'LL GET *NOTHING* FROM ME.

OH, THAT I *DOUBT.* I AM *MENTOR,* OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD. I POSSESS *HYPER-COGNITION FACULTIES* ENGINEERED TO THE *NTH* LEVEL.

YOU ARE *MALIK TARCEL,* AND YOU HAVE DEMONSTRATED YOUR *LACK* OF INTELLIGENCE BY TAKING ARMS AGAINST YOUR BIRTH RACE.

NOW STATE YOUR NAME.

IF YOU ALREADY *KNOW* MY NAME, WHY ARE YOU ASKING ME?

YOU REALLY DON'T KNOW THE *FIRST THING* ABOUT INTERROGATION, DO YOU?

GUARDSMAN MENTOR.

MY LORD! I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF EMPEROR VULCAN.

IS *THIS* THE ONE? THE SHI'AR WHO CHOSE *XANDAR* OVER *CHANDILAR*?

IT *IS*, MY EMPEROR.

WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

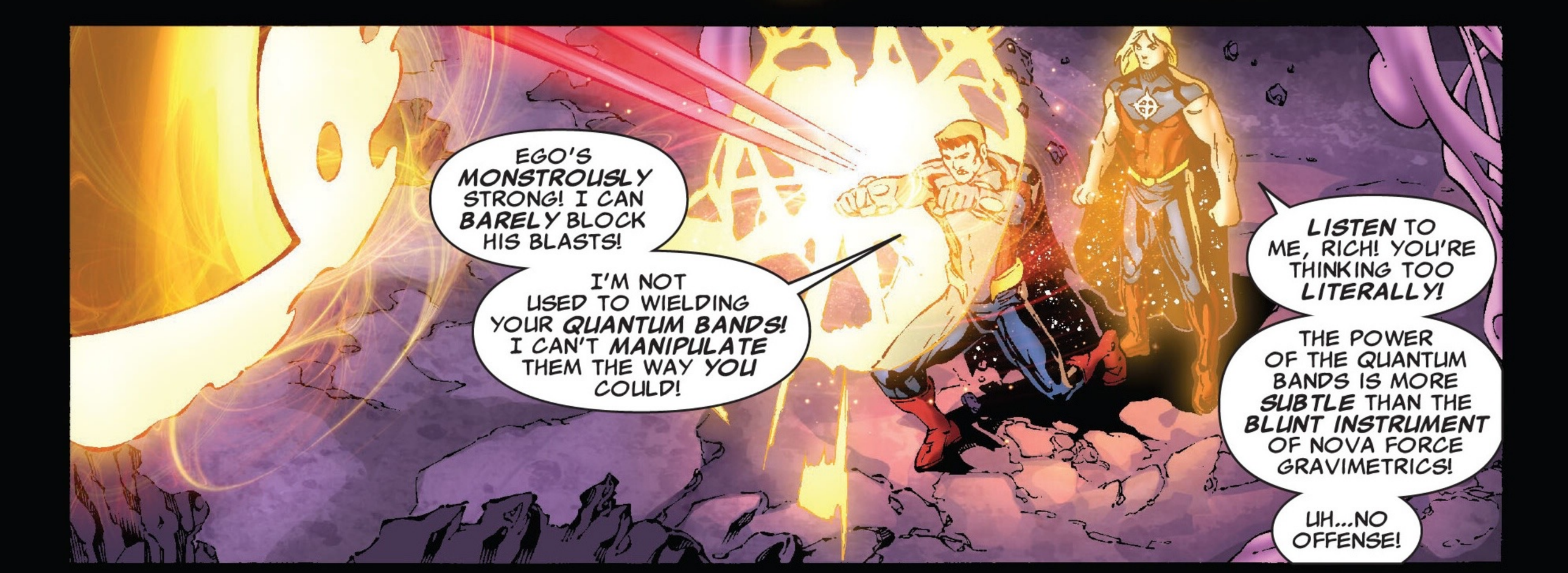
DID YOU *EXPLAIN* THE PRINCIPLES OF INTERROGATION TO THIS DUNG-BEETLE, MENTOR?

HE DIDN'T SEEM TO *GRASP* THEM, MY LORD.

PERHAPS HE'LL UNDERSTAND *THIS*.

EEARRGHHH!

CEREBRAL MATRIX, NU-XANDAR.
NHHHN! WENDELL! ARE YOU STILL WITH ME?
JUST ABOUT, RICH!

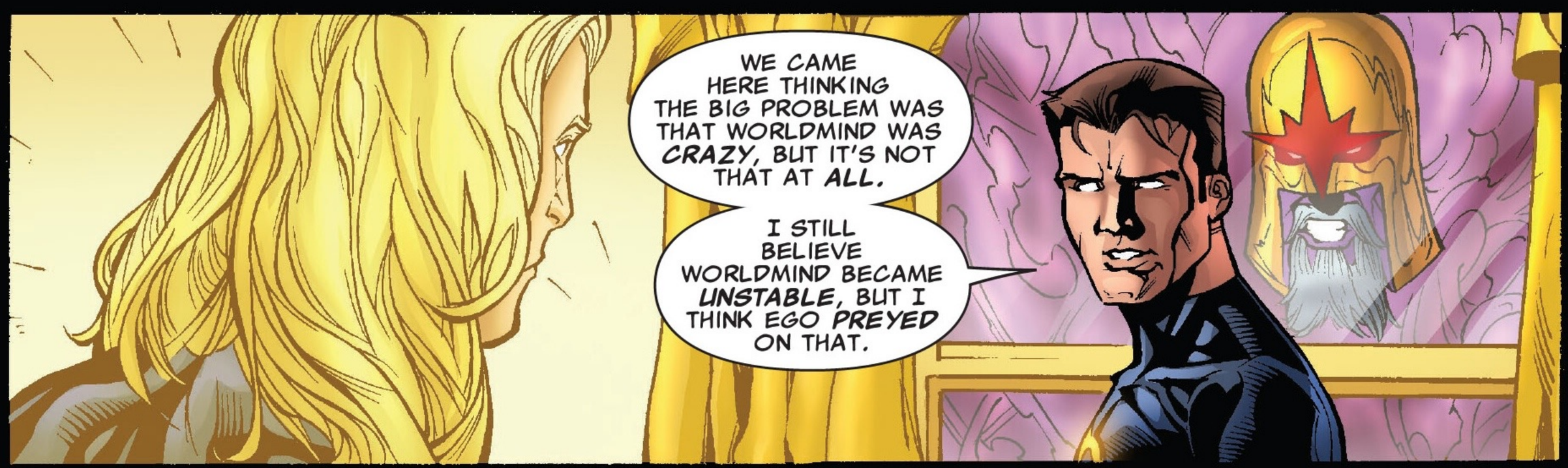

EGO'S MONSTROUSLY STRONG! I CAN BARELY BLOCK HIS BLASTS!
I'M NOT USED TO WIELDING YOUR QUANTUM BANDS! I CAN'T MANIPULATE THEM THE WAY YOU COULD!
LISTEN TO ME, RICH! YOU'RE THINKING TOO LITERALLY!
THE POWER OF THE QUANTUM BANDS IS MORE SUBTLE THAN THE BLUNT INSTRUMENT OF NOVA FORCE GRAVIMETRICS!
UH...NO OFFENSE!

DON'T WORRY ABOUT OFFENDING ME--JUST TELL ME WHAT TO DO! I CAN FEEL THE DEPTH OF THE BANDS ALL RIGHT, I JUST DON'T KNOW HOW TO USE THEM!
USE YOUR IMAGINATION AND YOUR WILL, RICHARD! EGO'S ATTACKS ARE MORE THAN JUST CONCUSSIVE AND KINETIC BLASTS!
THEY ARE MODULATED TO WIPE OUT YOUR CONFIDENCE AND RESISTANCE! TO SHRED YOUR PERSONALITY!
SO I'M THINKING TOO SMALL? JUST BLOCKING THEM ON A PHYSICAL LEVEL?
YES! YOU NEED MORE THAN JUST A SHIELD! YOU NEED TO BLOCK EGO ON ALL LEVELS! YOU NEED TO CREATE A SANCTUARY!

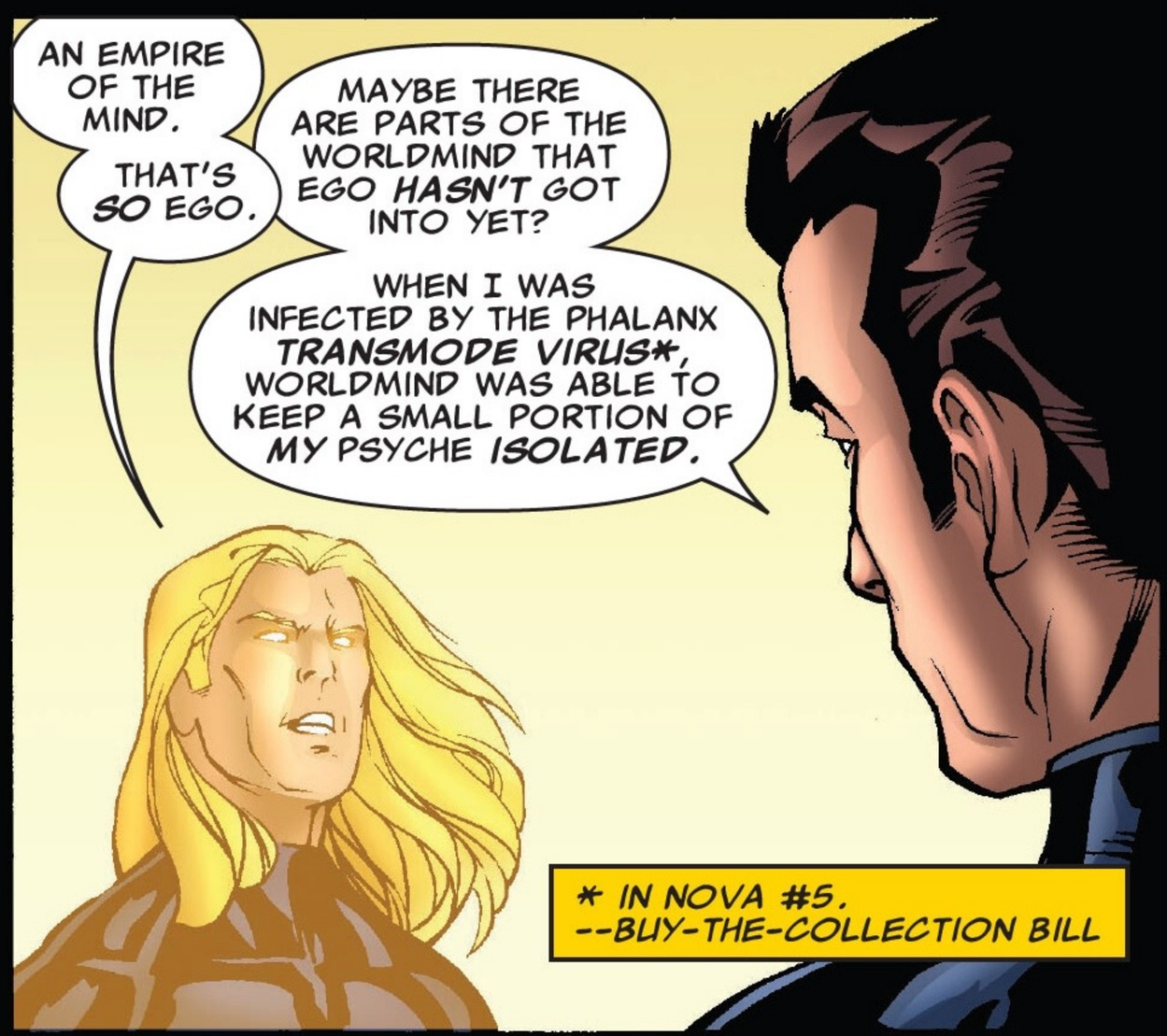
LIKE... THIS?

OUTSTANDING!
YOU'VE CONJURED THIS FROM, WHAT...YOUR OWN MEMORIES?
IT'S MY ROOM, WHEN I WAS GROWING UP. THE REAL VERSION STILL EXISTS IN LONG ISLAND.

IT'S PERFECT. IT'S MORE THAN A PHYSICAL SHIELD. IT'S PROTECTING YOU INTELLECTUALLY AND EMOTIONALLY.
NOT FOREVER. WHAT'S YOUR PLAN?
YEAH, BUT HOW LONG WILL IT KEEP HIM OUT?


WE CAME HERE THINKING THE BIG PROBLEM WAS THAT WORLDMIND WAS CRAZY, BUT IT'S NOT THAT AT ALL.
I STILL BELIEVE WORLDMIND BECAME UNSTABLE, BUT I THINK EGO PREYED ON THAT.

THAT WOULD BE TYPICAL OF EGO'S DOMINEERING PERSONALITY...IF WORLDMIND WAS VULNERABLE, AND REACHED OUT TO EGO FOR HELP...
EXACTLY.
AND TO THINK I FELT SORRY FOR EGO WHEN I THOUGHT THE WORLDMIND HAD LOBOTOMIZED HIM.
EGO'S JUST AFTER POWER, ISN'T HE? THE POWER OF THE NOVA FORCE AND THE LEGACY OF XANDARIAN KNOWLEDGE.

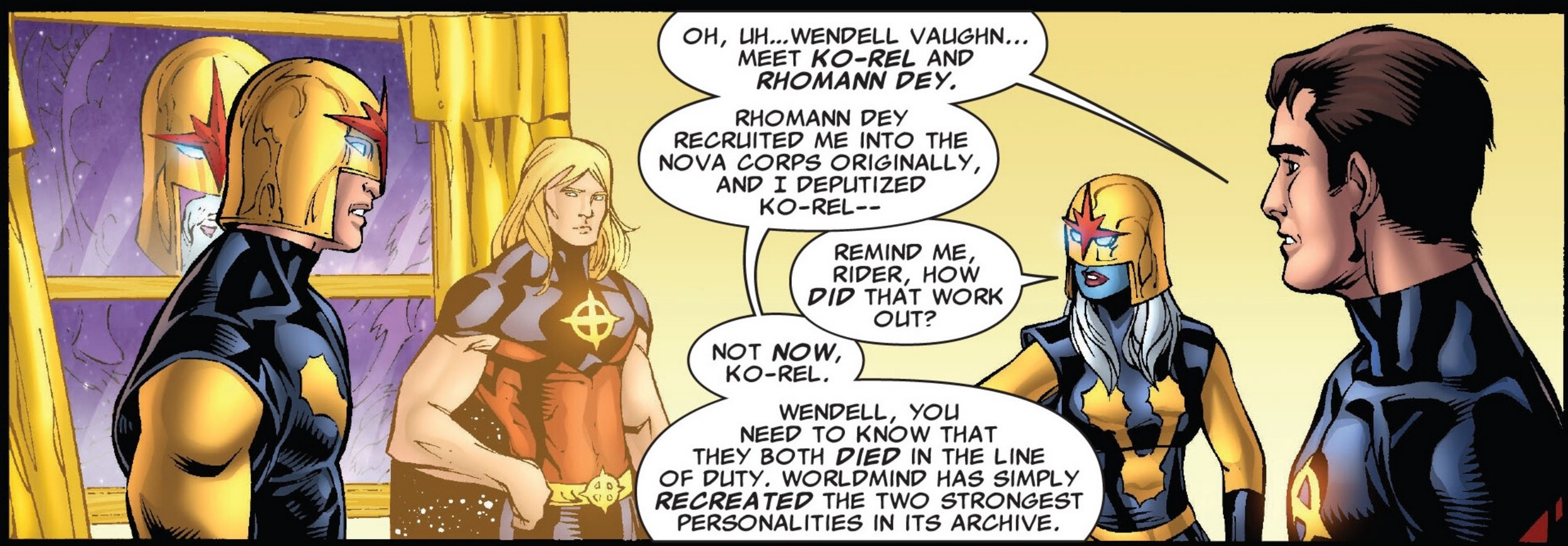

AN EMPIRE OF THE MIND.
THAT'S SO EGO.
MAYBE THERE ARE PARTS OF THE WORLDMIND THAT EGO HASN'T GOT INTO YET?
WHEN I WAS INFECTED BY THE PHALANX TRANSMODE VIRUS*, WORLDMIND WAS ABLE TO KEEP A SMALL PORTION OF MY PSYCHE ISOLATED.
* IN NOVA #5. --BUY-THE-COLLECTION BILL

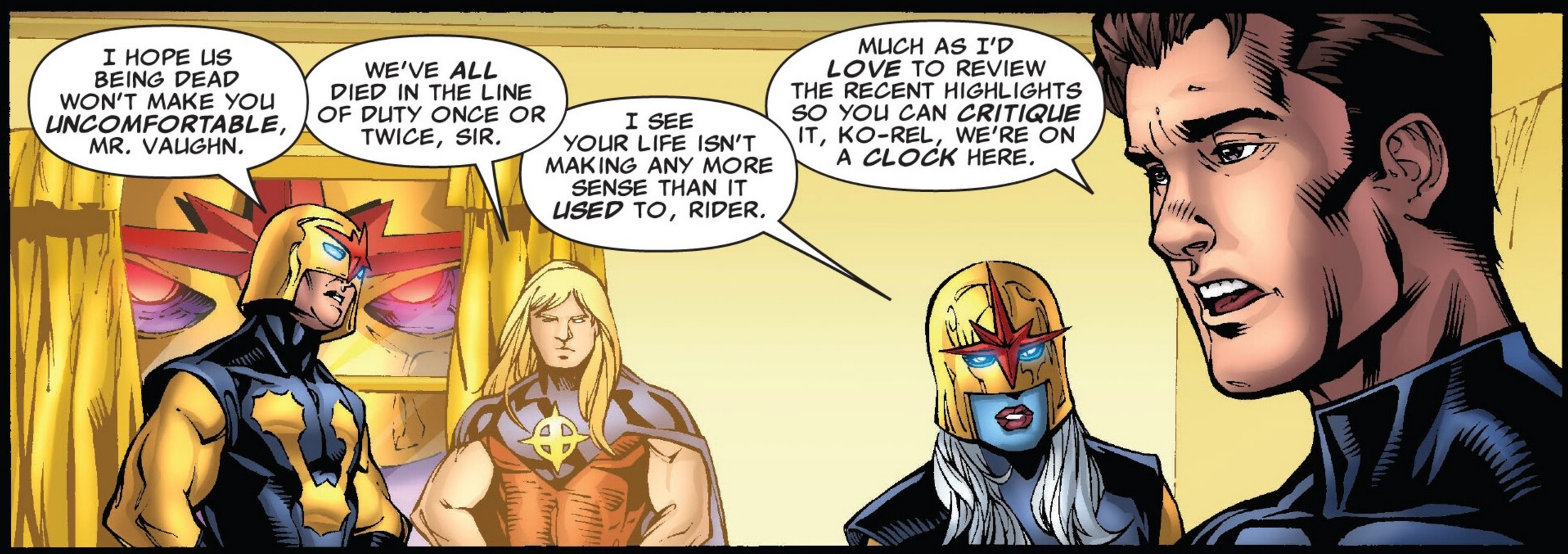
HELLO, RIDER.
YOU'RE LOOKING WELL, CENTURION.
UH... WORLDMIND? IS THIS YOU?

IT KEPT ME SANE. IT KEPT ME ALIVE. I'M WONDERING IF I CAN DO THE SAME THING IN REVERSE...
...IF I CAN REMEMBER HOW...
...IF I CAN IMAGINE HOW...

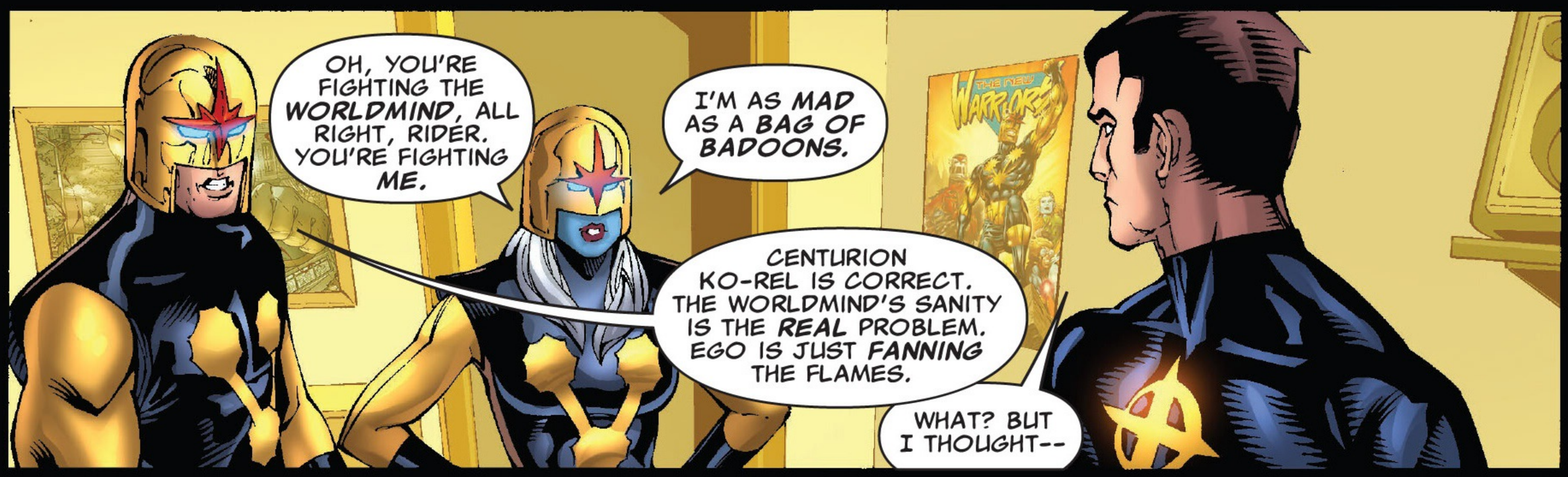
WE'RE THE WORLDMIND... THE LITTLE PART OF IT THAT'S NOT BUGFARK.
WHAT CENTURION KO-REL IS TRYING TO SAY IS THAT THE WORLDMIND IS USING OUR PERSONALITY TEMPLATES TO CREATE AN INTERFACE WITH YOU.

WORLDMIND CONJURED YOU FROM MY MEMORIES?
YEAH, LIKE DURING THE PHALANX ATTACK.
TO BE FAIR, IT'S ALL HORRIBLY SYMBOLIC. BUT THEN... WELCOME TO SYMBOLVILLE, POPULATION YOU.
UH, RICH?


OH, UH...WENDELL VAUGHN... MEET KO-REL AND RHOMANN DEY.
RHOMANN DEY RECRUITED ME INTO THE NOVA CORPS ORIGINALLY, AND I DEPUTIZED KO-REL--
REMIND ME, RIDER, HOW DID THAT WORK OUT?
NOT NOW, KO-REL.
WENDELL, YOU NEED TO KNOW THAT THEY BOTH DIED IN THE LINE OF DUTY. WORLDMIND HAS SIMPLY RECREATED THE TWO STRONGEST PERSONALITIES IN ITS ARCHIVE.


I HOPE US BEING DEAD WON'T MAKE YOU UNCOMFORTABLE, MR. VAUGHN.
WE'VE ALL DIED IN THE LINE OF DUTY ONCE OR TWICE, SIR.
I SEE YOUR LIFE ISN'T MAKING ANY MORE SENSE THAN IT USED TO, RIDER.
MUCH AS I'D LOVE TO REVIEW THE RECENT HIGHLIGHTS SO YOU CAN CRITIQUE IT, KO-REL, WE'RE ON A CLOCK HERE.

NO KIDDING!
EGO WILL BE THROUGH THIS WALL IN TWO MINUTES.
SO MAKE IT QUICK! WHAT AM I FIGHTING, WORLDMIND?


OH, YOU'RE FIGHTING THE WORLDMIND, ALL RIGHT, RIDER. YOU'RE FIGHTING ME.
I'M AS MAD AS A BAG OF BADOONS.
CENTURION KO-REL IS CORRECT. THE WORLDMIND'S SANITY IS THE REAL PROBLEM. EGO IS JUST FANNING THE FLAMES.
WHAT? BUT I THOUGHT--

AT THE FALL OF XANDAR, WHEN THE WORLDMIND DOWNLOADED HIMSELF AND THE NOVA FORCE INTO YOU, RICHARD, THERE WAS A RISK THAT THE STRESS WOULD DRIVE YOU INSANE.
THEREFORE, THE WORLDMIND DID EVERYTHING IT COULD TO PROTECT AND REINFORCE YOUR MIND SO YOU WOULD NOT BECOME ANOTHER GARTHAN SAAL, THE MAN WHO LAST ATTEMPTED TO CONTROL THE FULL NOVA FORCE.
IT JUST NEGLECTED TO DO THE SAME THING FOR ITSELF.

THE STRAIN OF KEEPING ME SANE DROVE IT MAD?
THE PHALANX INFECTION MADE THINGS WORSE, AS DID YOUR UNFORTUNATE TANGLE WITH GALACTUS.
I'M SO SORRY, SIR.
DON'T BE SORRY. FIX IT.
YOU NEED TO DISARM THE WORLDMIND BY TAKING BACK THE NOVA FORCE.
THEN YOU NEED TO PURGE THE MALIGN INFLUENCE OF EGO SO THAT THE WORLDMIND'S HIGHER FUNCTIONS CAN BE REPAIRED AND REINSTALLED.

AND YOU NEED TO DO ALL OF THAT NOW!
YOU REPRESENT A DANGER TO ME! YOU WILL BE DENIED!
YOU WILL BE DENIED!

SYSTEM OPERATIONS.

ATTENTION. IT IS CRITICAL YOU PAY ATTENTION AT THIS TIME.

AN ATTEMPT IS BEING MADE TO BREACH MY HUB SANCTUM.

CENTURIONS... DEFEND ME!

I AM CENTURION IRANI RAEL. I OBEY.

I AM CENTURION DAVID GREEN. I OBEY.

I AM CENTURION FREYA SHANE. I OBEY.

I AM CENTURION KYLE DYNE. I OBEY.

I AM CENTURION ZYZIWC TIEL. I OBEY.

YOU WILL BE DENIED!

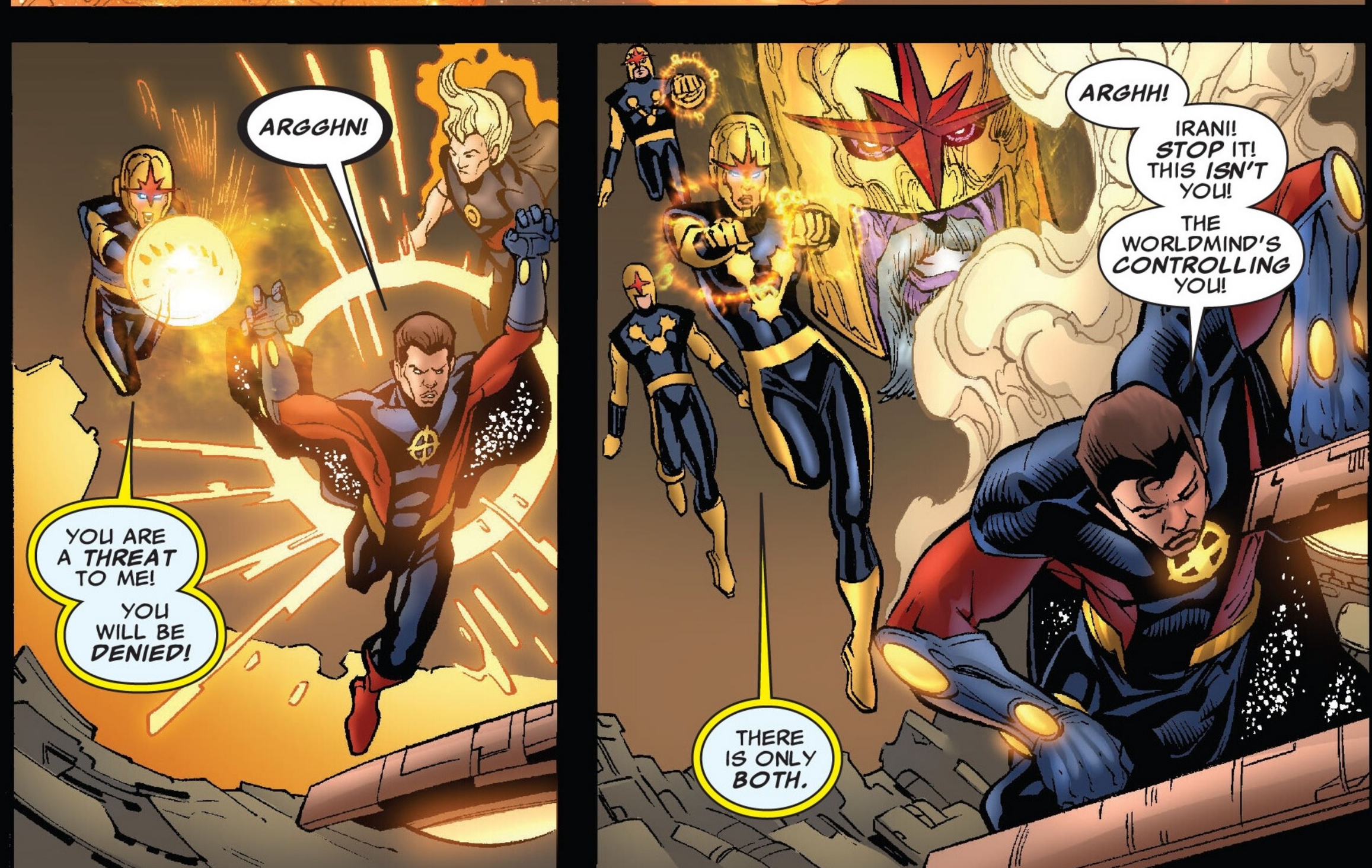
YOU WILL BE DENIED!

BLUE BLAZES! HE'S ALL OVER ME! GOTTA PULL CLEAR AND--

BACK OFF! I DON'T WANT TO HURT YOU!
YOU WILL BE DENIED! YOU ARE A THREAT TO ME!

WENDELL, I'M THROUGH INTO THE HUB!

KEEP GOING, RICH! YOU CAN DO THIS! YOU CA--


ARGGHN!
YOU ARE A THREAT TO ME!
YOU WILL BE DENIED!
ARGHH!
IRANI! STOP IT! THIS ISN'T YOU!
THE WORLDMIND'S CONTROLLING YOU!
THERE IS ONLY BOTH.

STOP IT! AGGHHH! WORLDMIND! STOP IT!
YOU DON'T WANT TO DO THIS! NHHHH! YOU WANT TO HELP ME!
YOU WILL BE DENIED!

THINK ABOUT IT! EVEN WHEN YOU'D LOST YOUR MIND, YOU WERE TRYING TO HELP ME!
REBUILDING THE CORPS?! TURNING TO EGO FOR SUPPORT?! IT WAS ALL TO HELP ME! TO TAKE THE PRESSURE OFF ME!

YOU'VE BEEN TRYING TO HELP ME ALL ALONG!

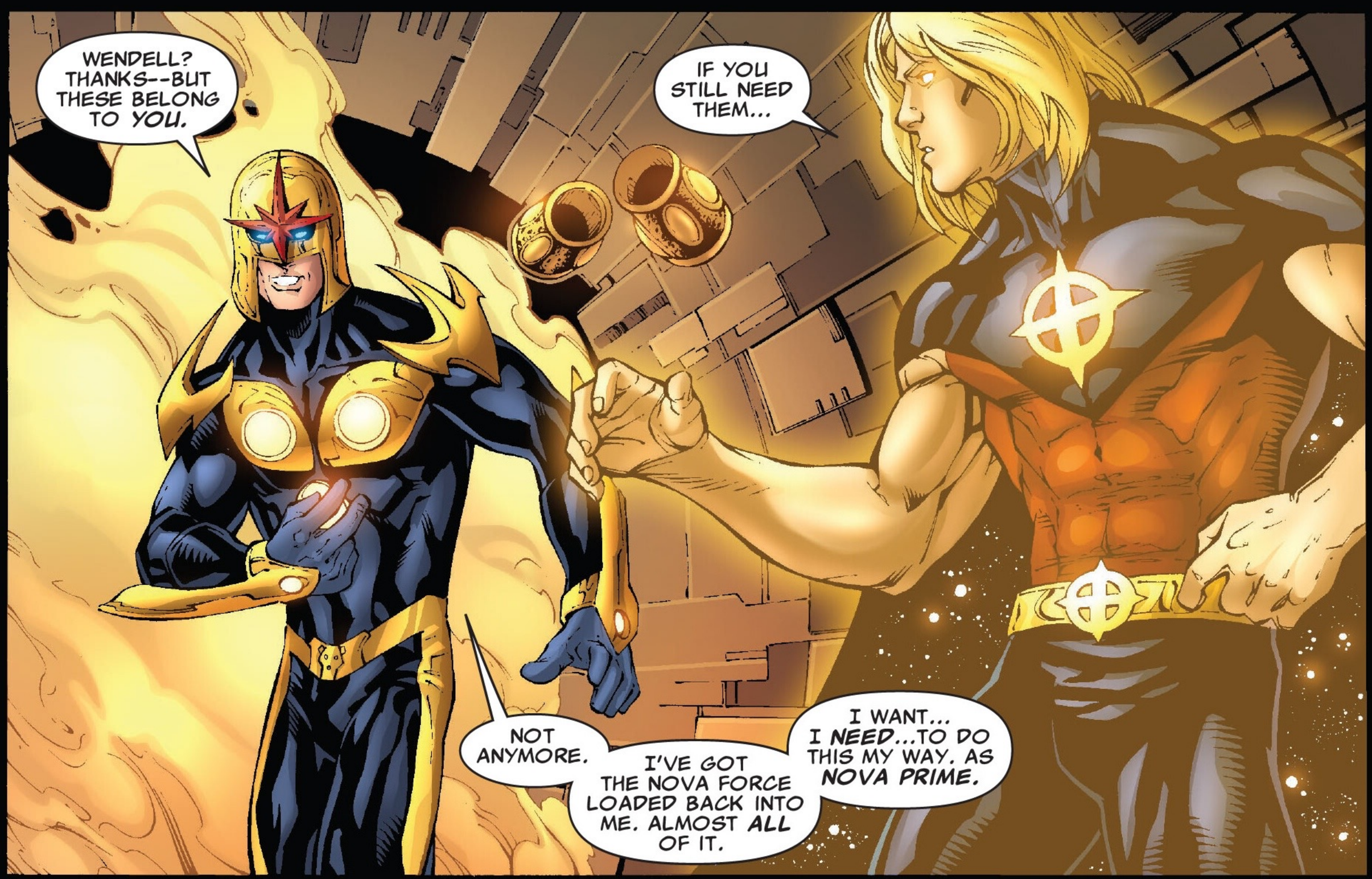
I...I... ATTENTION...
IT IS CRITICAL THAT I...
CRITICAL THAT I...
IT IS CRITICAL...IT IS CRITICAL...

UNGH. THAT HURT LIKE HELL, BUT IT LOOKS LIKE IT FROZE THEM.

NOW...I'LL TAKE THAT, IF YOU DON'T MIND.

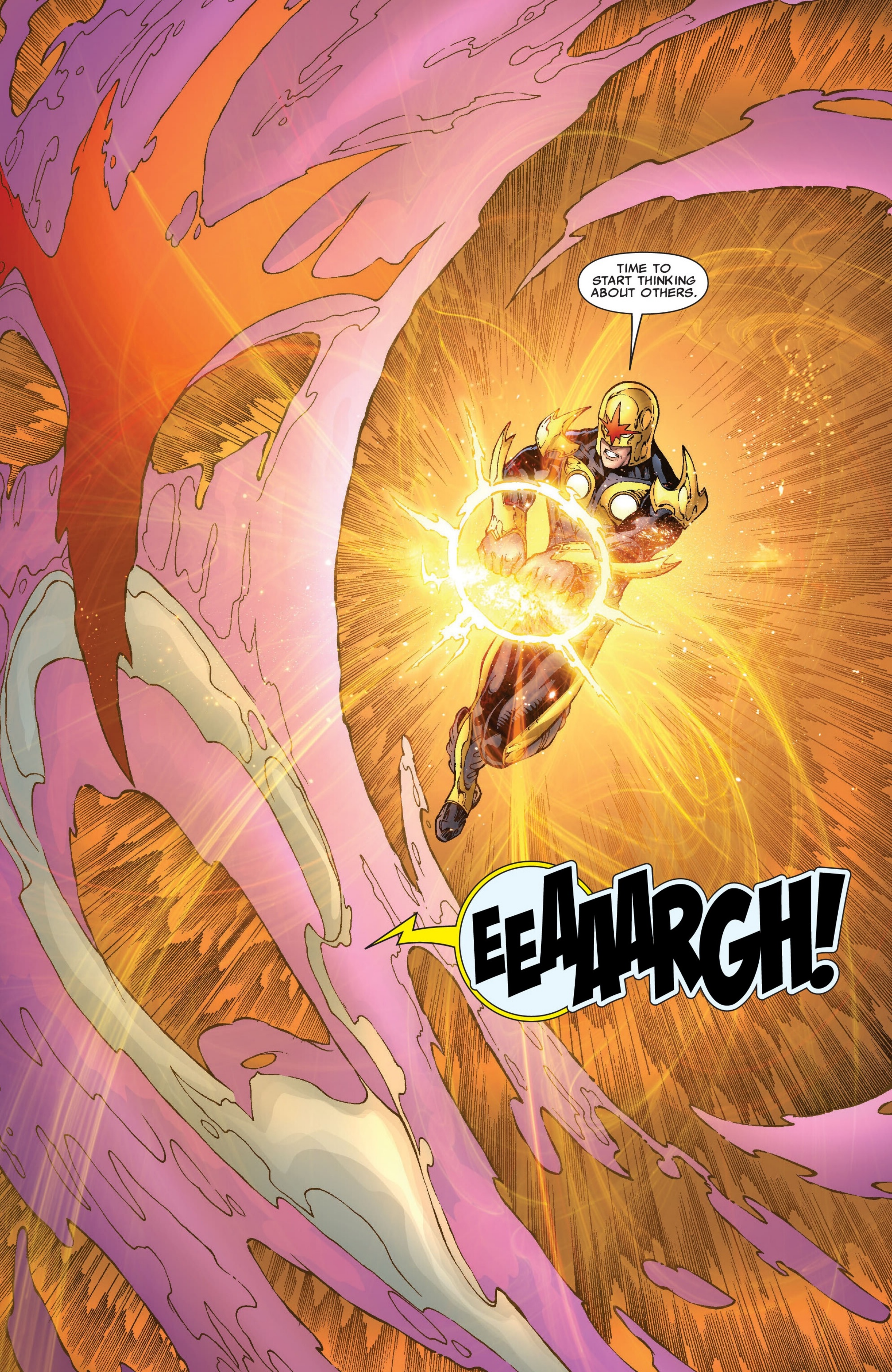
SHAZAM!

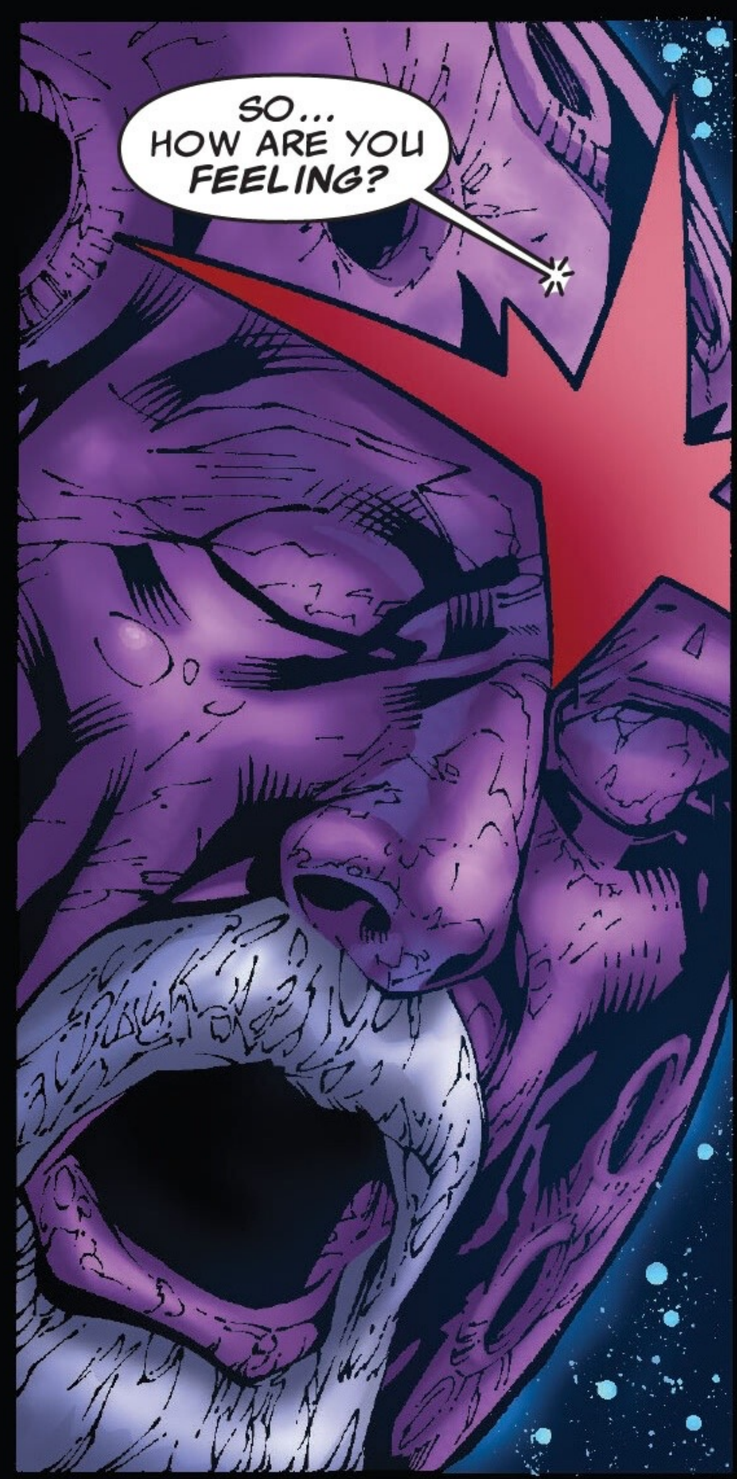
NOW THIS IS MORE LIKE IT.

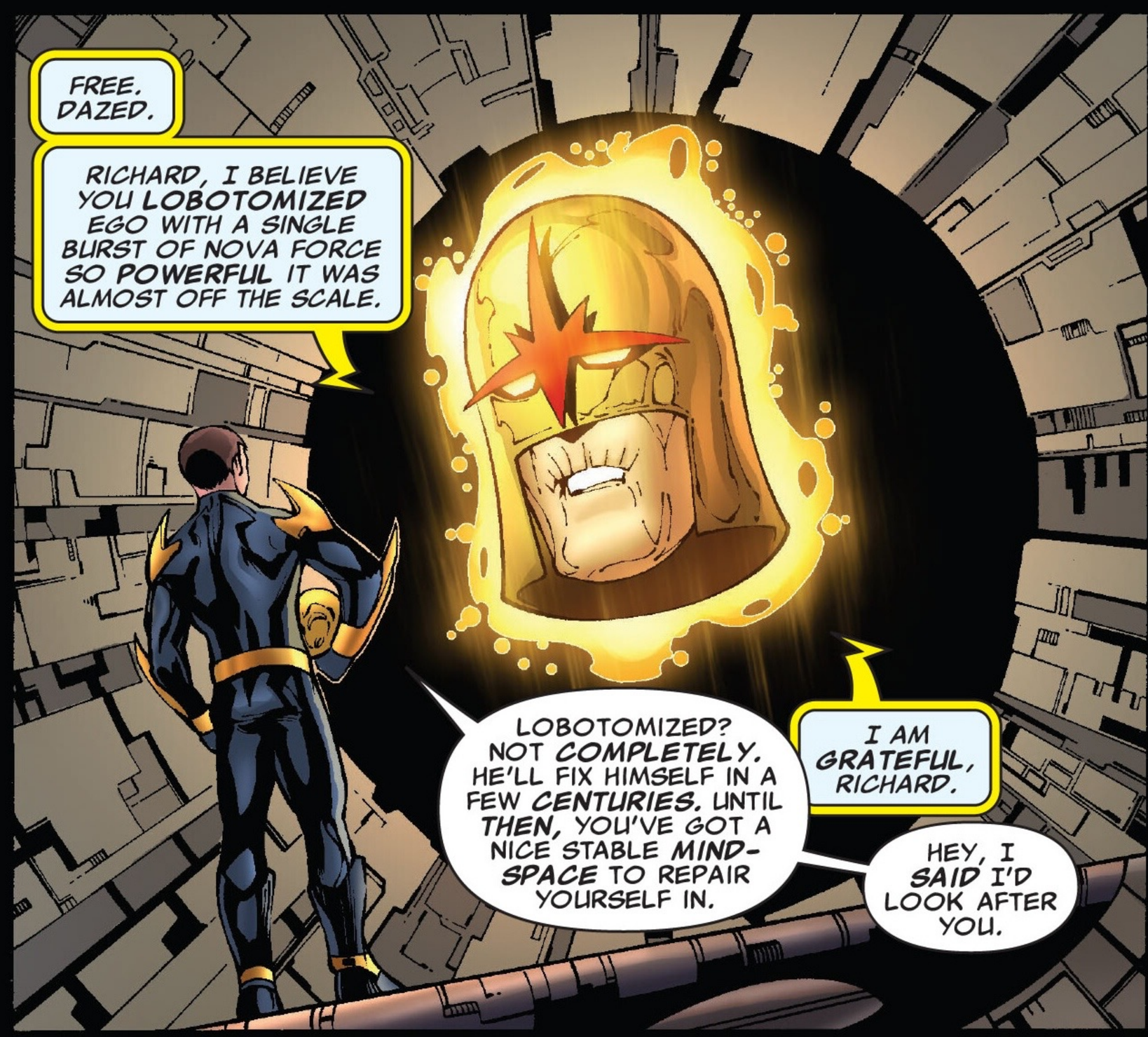

WENDELL? THANKS--BUT THESE BELONG TO YOU.
IF YOU STILL NEED THEM...
NOT ANYMORE.
I'VE GOT THE NOVA FORCE LOADED BACK INTO ME. ALMOST ALL OF IT.
I WANT... I NEED...TO DO THIS MY WAY. AS NOVA PRIME.

YOU WILL BE DENIED! YOU ARE A THREAT! YOU ARE A THREAT TO ME!
TO ME!

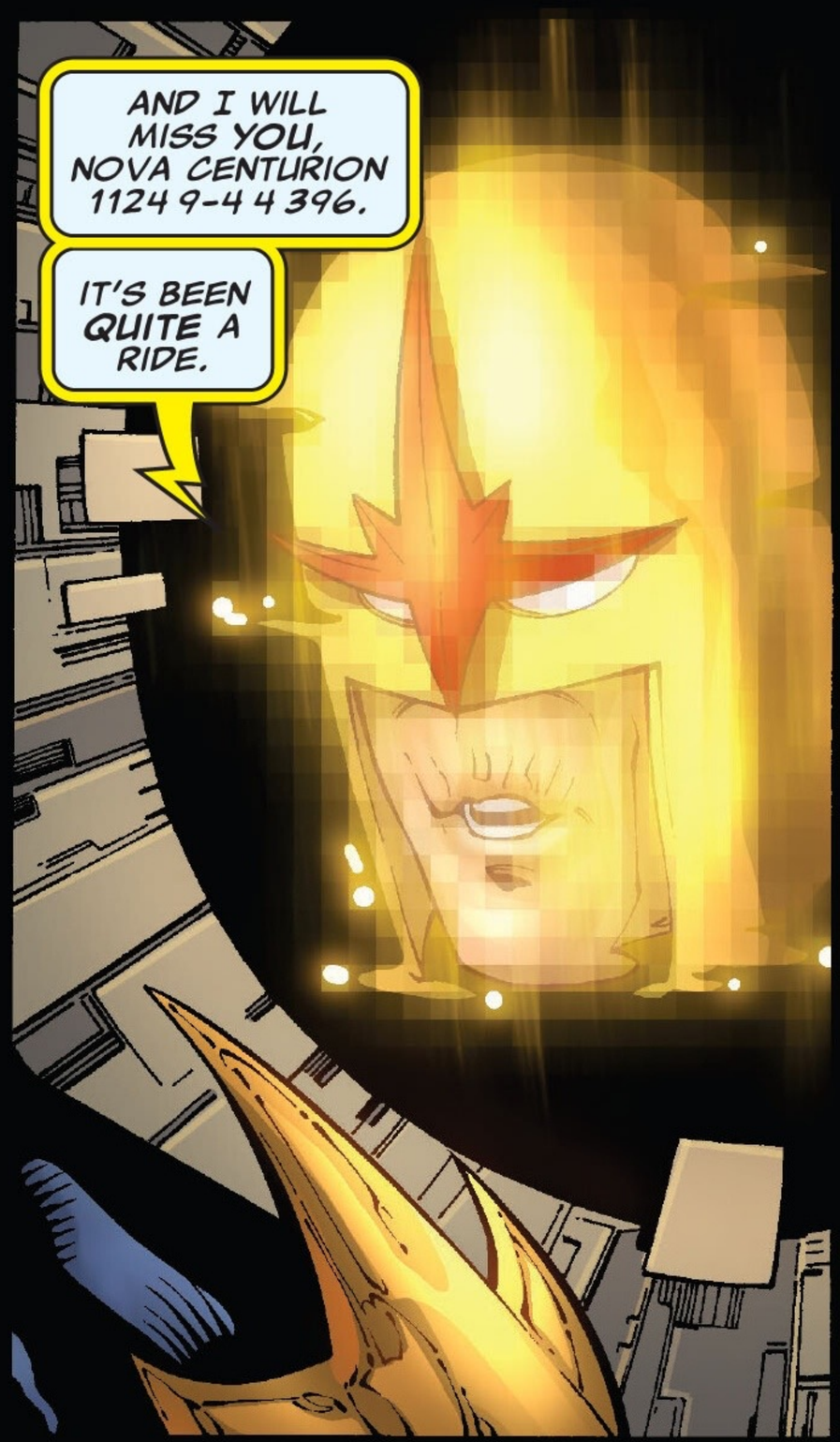
IT'S ALL "ME, ME, ME" WITH YOU, ISN'T IT, EGO?


TIME TO START THINKING ABOUT OTHERS.
EEAAARGH!


SO... HOW ARE YOU FEELING?


FREE. DAZED.
RICHARD, I BELIEVE YOU LOBOTOMIZED EGO WITH A SINGLE BURST OF NOVA FORCE SO POWERFUL IT WAS ALMOST OFF THE SCALE.
LOBOTOMIZED? NOT COMPLETELY. HE'LL FIX HIMSELF IN A FEW CENTURIES. UNTIL THEN, YOU'VE GOT A NICE STABLE MIND-SPACE TO REPAIR YOURSELF IN.
I AM GRATEFUL, RICHARD.
HEY, I SAID I'D LOOK AFTER YOU.

AND YOU DID. IT SADDENS ME, THEREFORE, THAT THIS WILL BE THE LAST TIME WE CONVERSE.
WHAT?
THE INSTABILITY THAT I HAVE BEEN SUFFERING FROM HAS AFFECTED THIS GUIDE PERSONALITY.
THIS GUIDE PERSONALITY HAS BEEN IRREVOCABLY DAMAGED AND COMPROMISED.
YEAH, BUT--
IN ORDER TO SAFEGUARD THE INTEGRITY OF THE WORLDMIND GESTALT, I MUST EXPUNGE THIS PERSONALITY AND INSTALL AN UNDAMAGED REPLACEMENT.
IT IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE HEALING PROCESS.
BUT...NO, YOU CAN'T GO, WORLDMIND.
I'LL MISS YOU.

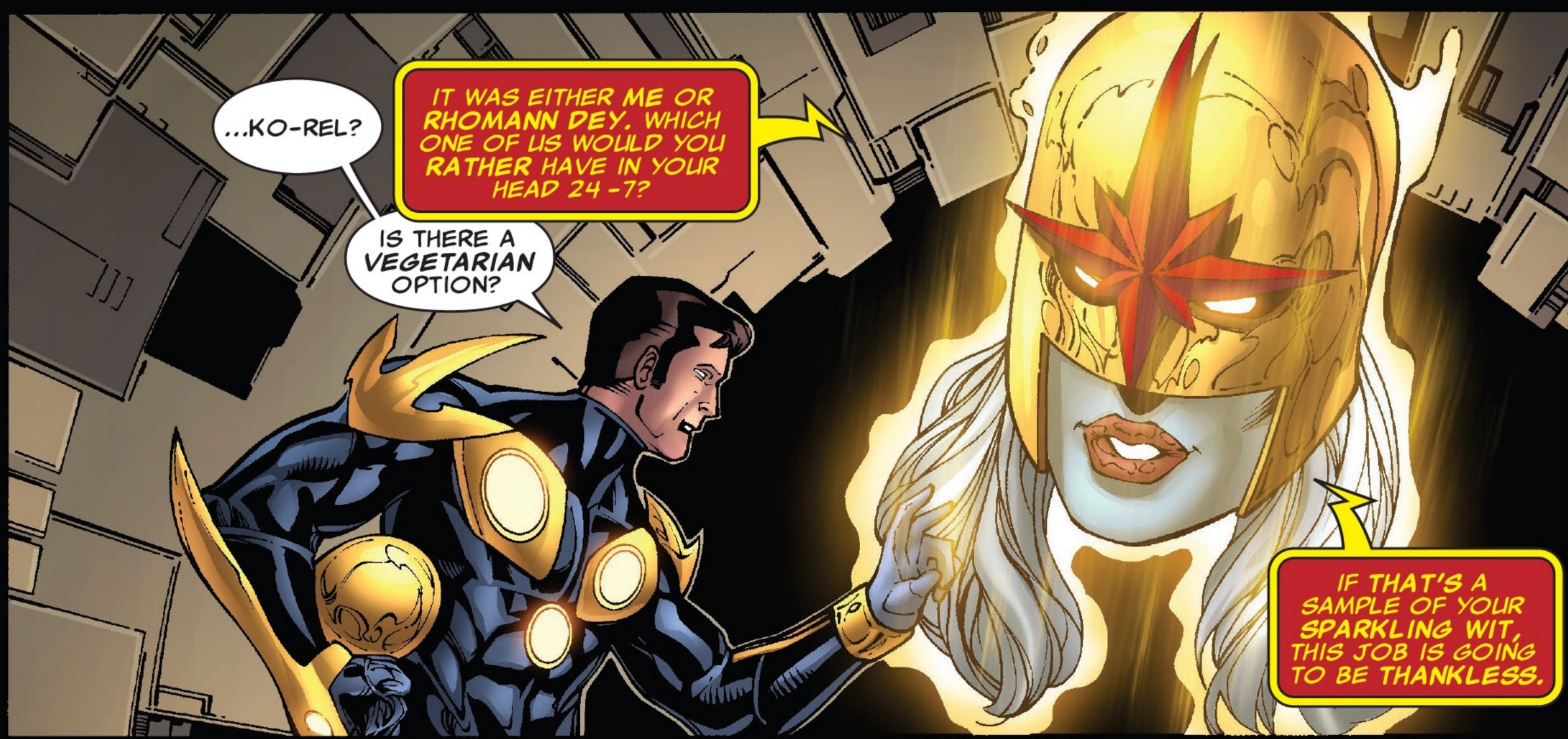

AND I WILL MISS YOU, NOVA CENTURION 1124 9-4 4 396.
IT'S BEEN QUITE A RIDE.

NOW HANG ON--
PERSONALITY ERASURE COMMENCING.
GOOD-BYE, RICHARD.

WORLDMIND! OH MY GOD...
WORLDMIND!

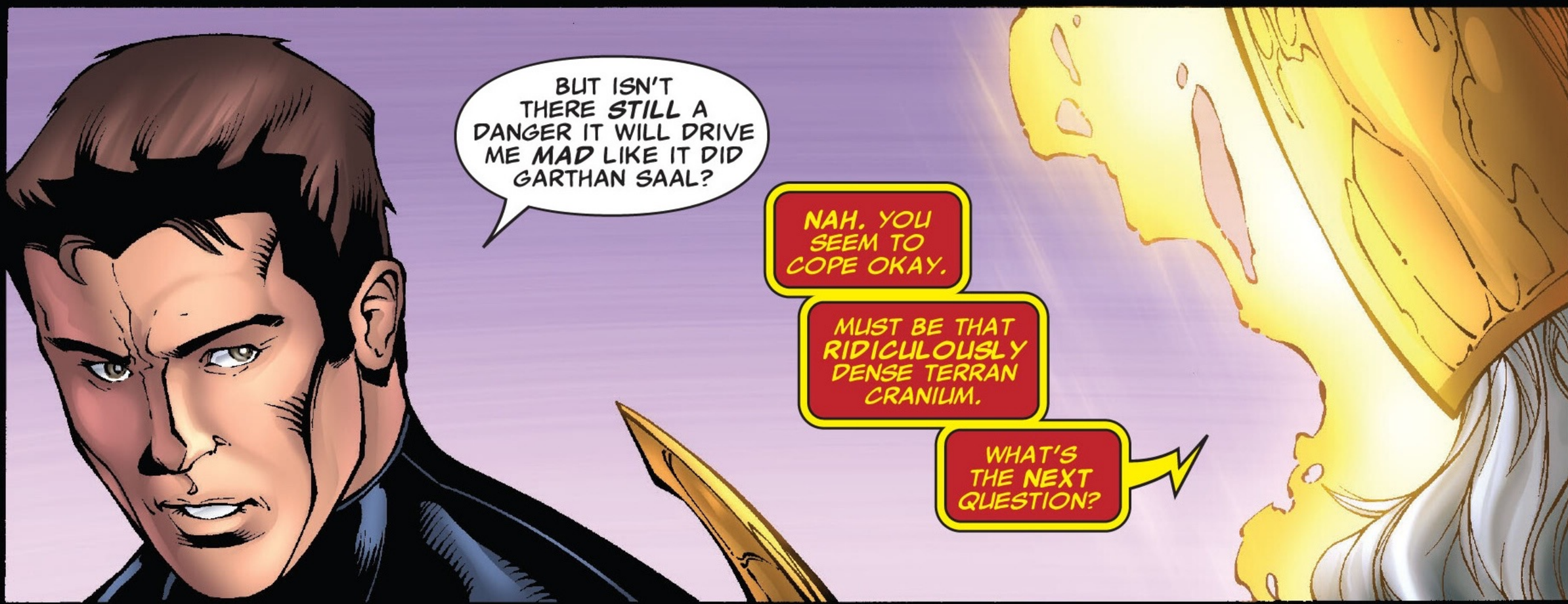
WHAT?!
WORLDMIND?
YES? WHAT DO YOU WANT?

UH... WHAT JUST HAPPENED?
I EXPUNGED MY OLD GUIDE PERSONALITY AND INSTALLED A NEW ONE, LIKE I TOLD YOU I WAS GOING TO.
DO TRY TO KEEP UP, RIDER.
OH-- YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT? YOU'RE...


...KO-REL?
IT WAS EITHER ME OR RHOMANN DEY. WHICH ONE OF US WOULD YOU RATHER HAVE IN YOUR HEAD 24-7?
IS THERE A VEGETARIAN OPTION?
IF THAT'S A SAMPLE OF YOUR SPARKLING WIT, THIS JOB IS GOING TO BE THANKLESS.

ARE WE REALLY GOING TO BE ABLE TO WORK TOGETHER?
SIGH.
OF COURSE WE ARE, NOVA PRIME. I'M THE WORLDMIND. I'M HERE TO SERVE YOU.

THEN HOW ABOUT WE START WITH A FEW QUESTIONS?
WHAT DO I DO WITH THE NOVA FORCE? DO I KEEP IT? AND HAS IT FIXED MY BODY?
YES. CARRYING THE NOVA FORCE ALTERED YOUR MOLECULAR STRUCTURE, RIDER. YOU CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT IT.


BUT ISN'T THERE STILL A DANGER IT WILL DRIVE ME MAD LIKE IT DID GARTHAN SAAL?
NAH. YOU SEEM TO COPE OKAY.
MUST BE THAT RIDICULOUSLY DENSE TERRAN CRANIUM.
WHAT'S THE NEXT QUESTION?

I SAW WHAT HE DID TO YOU. WHAT VULCAN DID TO YOU.

HE DIDN'T WANT INFORMATION. HE DIDN'T EVEN WANT YOUR ABJECT SURRENDER.

HE JUST WANTED TO HEAR YOU SCREAM.

WELL, HE MADE YOU SCREAM SO LOUD, I HEARD YOU TOO.

W-WHO...

W-WHO ARE Y-YOU..?

I'M GARTHAN SAAL, AND I'VE COME TO RESCUE YOU.

KAIPHAS, THE GULF OF SARENTA, KREE TERRITORY, HOUR 136 OF THE KREE-SHIAR WAR.
THIS IS NOVA CENTURION TRE OWENS, SERIAL 232324-5! I REPEAT! WE ARE PINNED DOWN AND TAKING CASUALTIES!
WORLDMIND? DO YOU COPY?
WE'VE LOST KASEEM! WE'VE LOST HANNAH TOO!
HELLO?
TRE? TRE, TELL ME YOU GOT A RESPONSE, MATE.
SORRY, LINDY.
IT'S THE SAME AS IT'S BEEN FOR THE LAST NINETY MINUTES. IT'S DEAD.
IT'S LIKE THE WORLDMIND'S GONE OFF-LINE.
HOW DOES SOMETHING LIKE WORLDMIND GO OFF-LINE?
I DON'T KNOW, MATU, BUT WITHOUT IT, MY WHOLE EDGE HAS GONE. ALL MY INTEL AND--
INCOMING!
HOLY--!
MATU?! MATU?!
AIIIEEE--!

WORLDMIND, WE JUST LOST MATU!
FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, WORLDMIND! HELP US!
YEAH, LISTEN TO TRE, WORLDMIND!
WE GOT HERE SIX HOURS AGO! KAIPHAS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A KREE COLONY WORLD!
WELL, NOT ANY MORE! THANKS TO SHI'AR NEGA-BOMBS, IT'S A BUNCHA CHARCOAL!
WHEN WE GATED IN, THERE WAS NOWHERE TO GO EXCEPT THE WRECKAGE OF THE ORBITAL DOCKYARDS.
THEN A SHI'AR STAR DESTROYER IONCLAD SHOWED UP.
IT'S SENT IMPERIAL GUARD INTO THE WRECKAGE BELT TO KILL US, WORLDMIND. IF WE MOVE CLEAR OF THE WRECKAGE, THE IONCLAD'S GUNS WILL TOAST US.
LINDY'S RIGHT, WORLDMIND. IT'S MURDER HERE.
WE JUST WANT A STARGATE OUT OF HERE, WORLDMIND... PLEASE...WE JUST NEED YOU TO CALCULATE A STARGATE!

HEL-LO, LITTLE DEAD BOY. WARSTAR IS HERE TO SNAP YOUR NECK IN THE NAME OF EMPEROR VULCAN.
AUTHORIZE LETHAL FORCE.
HUH?
SHZZAK
HANG TIGHT, CENTURIONS.
GET READY TO FOLLOW ME.
NOVA PRIME? JEEZ, ARE WE GLAD TO SEE YOU!
BUT WHAT ABOUT THE IONCLAD?

YEAH, I'D BETTER TAKE CARE OF THAT TOO, RIGHT?
STAY DOWN.
HELLO, YOU SHI'AR SONS OF SHLAGS. DO I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION?
GOOD...

SAVING PRIVATE ROBBIE

--SO YOU CLEANED EGO OUT OF THE WORLDMIND, SIR? AND BECAME NOVA PRIME AGAIN?

KIND OF, TRE. I HAD TO *REBOOT* WORLDMIND, WHICH IS WHY IT WENT OFF-LINE FOR A BIT.

IT WAS *HORRIBLE* NOT HAVING WORLDMIND THERE. I FELT... *LOST.*

NU-XANDAR.

THAT'S *NATURAL*, LINDY. EVER SINCE YOU GUYS WERE RECRUITED, WORLDMIND HAS BEEN PUMPING YOU WITH ENDORPHINS TO MAKE YOU *HAPPY* AND SUBLIMINAL MESSAGES TO KEEP YOU *PLIANT.*

NO! YOU MEAN...*MIND CONTROL?*

PRETTY MUCH. YOU'LL FIND THAT WORLDMIND'S INTERFACE PERSONALITY IS A LITTLE... *DIFFERENT* SINCE THE REBOOT.

WORLDMIND? TRIAGE AREA FIFTEEN TO STANDBY. I HAVE CASUALTIES. I'M BRINGING IN THE REMAINS OF COHORT FIVE-OH FROM KIAPHAS.

ABOUT TIME, RIDER.

THANK YOU, KO-REL.

WORLDMIND'S A *SHE* NOW?

IT'S *BAD*, ISN'T IT, NOVA PRIME?

YES, TRE. IT'S BAD.

WHAT'S THE PLAN?

WE BRING AS MANY CENTURIONS AS WE CAN OUT OF THE FIGHTING ZONES, PATCH THEM UP AND SEND THEM HOME.

TO EARTH?
TO WHEREVER WORLDMIND TOOK THEM FROM.
HOW MANY YOU GOT?
ABOUT EIGHTY PERCENT. THE REST ARE LOCKED IN BATTLE SITUATIONS AND IT'S GOING TO BE A MATTER OF GOING TO GET THEM.
WHAT CAN I DO, SIR?
DEBRIEF, GO HOME TO ANACOSTIA, AND LIVE A LONG, SAFE LIFE.
BUT I WANT TO SERVE, SIR.
YEAH, ME TOO!
CENTURIONS TRE OWENS AND LINDY NOLAN HAVE BOTH SHOWED THEMSELVES TO BE CAPABLE CORPSMEN, RIDER.
THEY MEET THE CRITERIA. IT WOULD BE A SHAME T--
ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT.
GUYS, WE CAN USE ALL THE HELP WE CAN GET. IF YOU WANT TO STAY ON, FOR A WHILE AT LEAST, WORLDMIND CAN CERTAINLY FIND PLACES YOU CAN HELP OUT.
THANK YOU, SIR.
YEAH!
SYSTEM OPERATIONS, NU-XANDAR.
I AM STILL UNABLE TO GET A SOLID FIX ON YOUR BROTHER'S SUIT TRACER, NOVA PRIME.
OKAY.
IT IS AS IF IT HAS BEEN SWITCHED OFF. OR DISABLED. OR--
OKAY.
MIA
MISSING IN ACTION

AGAIN, I *APOLOGIZE.* I SHOULD *NOT* HAVE ALLOWED ROBERT RIDER TO LEAVE NU-XANDAR AND--

IT'S *OKAY,* IRANI.

MY KID BROTHER WAS *ALWAYS* PRETTY HEADSTRONG. I DON'T BLAME YOU.

BUT HE *IS* MISSING, NOVA PRIME.

THE ONLY THING WE KNOW FOR SURE IS THAT ROBBIE HEADED OUT WITH QUBIT TO THE KREE PLANETOID *NIL-RAST,* RIGHT?

THAT IS CORRECT, CENTURION MORROW.

THEY WERE RESPONDING-- UNOFFICIALLY-- TO REPORTS OF A SHI'AR ATROCITY.

NIL-RAST IS WHERE TARCEL WAS FORCED TO *SURRENDER* TO THE IMPERIAL GUARD.

YES, BUT AFTER THE SURRENDER IT IS POSSIBLE THAT CERTAIN IMPERIAL GUARD ELEMENTS MASSACRED THE CENTURION PRISONERS.

ALL MEMBERS OF COHORT 86 ARE MISSING, PRESUMED DEAD.

I COULD GO TO NIL-RAST. I COULD BREAK SHI'AR *BONES* UNTIL THEY TOLD ME WHERE ROBERT WAS.

THANKS, FRAKTUR, BUT THIS ONE'S *MINE.*

FLLLKK

I CAN'T WAIT ANY LONGER TO SEE IF WE GET A FIX ON ROBBIE'S TRACER. I'VE GOTTA GO OUT LOOKING FOR HIM.

FRAKTUR? TAKE CHARGE HERE. THERE ARE SOME GOOD VOLUNTEERS LIKE TRE OWENS AND LINDY NOLAN AVAILABLE TO HELP YOU.

KEEP THE EXTRACTION PROGRAM ROLLING. GET AS *MANY* OF OUR PEOPLE OUT OF THE FIRING LINE AS YOU CAN.

MORROW? IRANI? YOU'RE WITH ME.

KREE PLANETOID NIL-KAST.

THANK YOU, WORLDMIND.

STARGATE EXIT MATCH COMPLETE.

NO.

I TAKE IT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS LOCATION HAS NOT PASSED YOU BY, RIDER.

THIS IS WHERE WE FOUGHT. THIS IS WHERE YOUR PSYCHO GIRLFRIEND MURDERED ME.

GAMORA WAS PHALANX-INFECTED. SHE KILLED KREE STELLAR CAPTAIN KO-REL.

THAT'S NOT YOU. YOU'RE NOT KO-REL, EVEN THOUGH YOU TALK LIKE HER.

YOU'RE THE WORLDMIND NOW.

YEAH.

STILL, DOESN'T MEAN I CAN'T BITCH ABOUT IT, RIGHT?

CLOSE UP! SITREP?

THE SHI'AR STRIKE FORCE THAT TOOK THIS PLACE FROM OUR FORCES HAS SINCE BEEN COUNTER-ASSAULTED BY THE KREE-INHUMAN COMBINED ARMY.

WE SHOULD CONSIDER THIS A HOT ZONE.

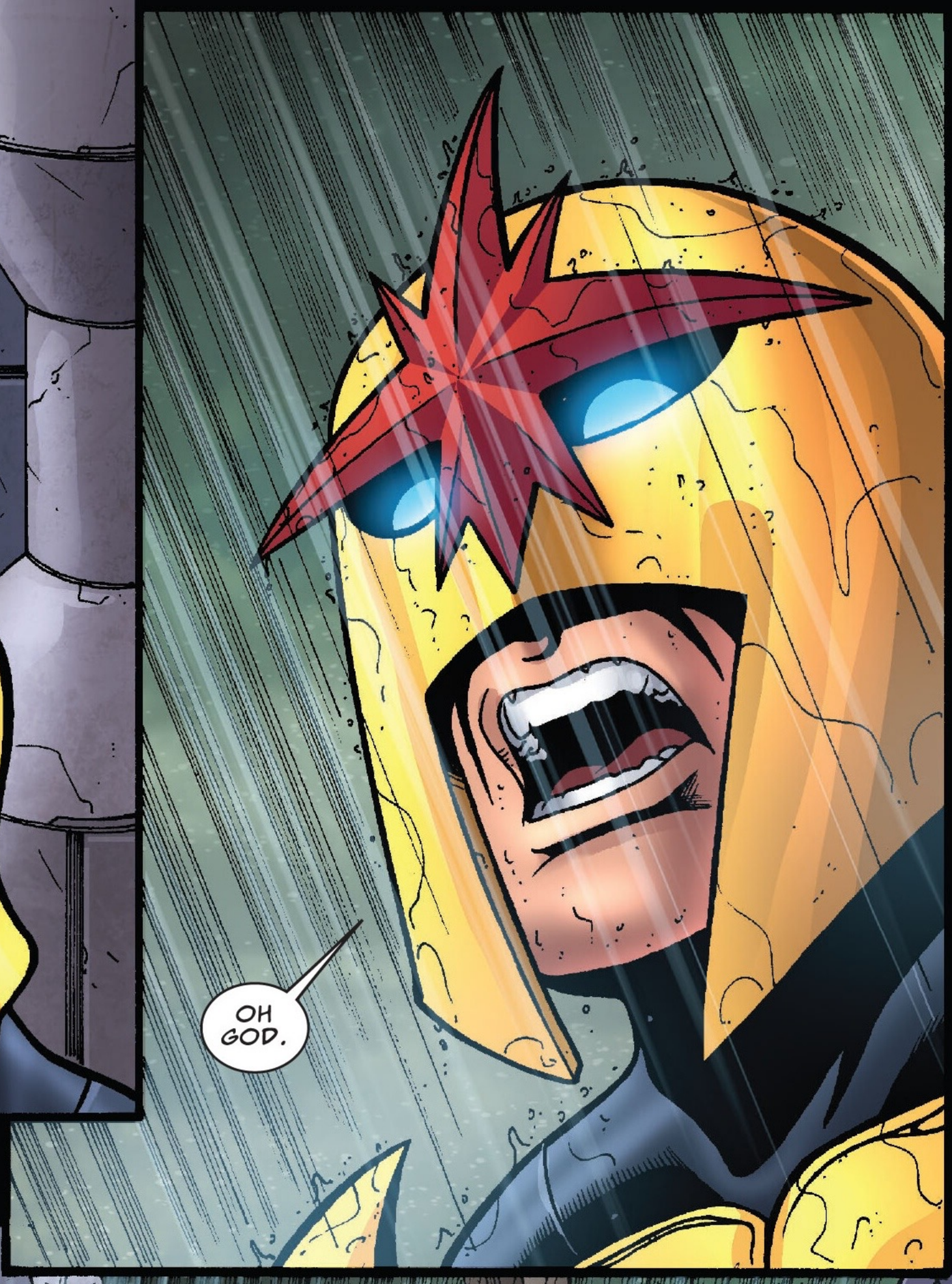
NO KIDDING!
SHIELDS! DOUBLE STRENGTH!
WHAT THE BLUE BLAZES ARE THEY SHOOTING AT US WITH?
ECHO-WEAPONS. THEY USE VIBRANIUM CAPACITORS TO STORE AND THEN DISCHARGE THE VOCALIZATIONS OF THE INHUMAN KING.
THEY'RE SHOOTING AT US WITH BLACK BOLT'S VOICE?
HOLY CRUD! NO WONDER IT HURTS!
WORLDMIND, AMP UP MY COMM SIGNAL!
INHUMANS! STAND DOWN! WE ARE CENTURIONS OF THE NOVA CORPS ON A PEACEKEEPING MISSION!
NIL-RAST IS SOVEREIGN KREE TERRITORY, AND IT HAS BEEN VIOLATED!
ALL INTRUDERS WILL BE CONSIDERED HOSTILE!
YEAH? SAYS WHO?

THE NEW INHUMAN ELITE.
TRITON? OH, CRAP!
THIS ISN'T WHAT WE CAME FOR! WE'RE NOT FIGHTING A MEMBER OF THEIR ROYAL FAMILY!
THEY DO NOT APPEAR TO HAVE THE SAME QUALMS, NOVA PRIME!
STAND DOWN! STAND DOWN NOW!
I CAN VOUCH FOR THIS MAN, LORD TRITON.
HE IS NOT OUR ENEMY.
RA-VENN, WHY DO YOU--?
GOOD TO SEE YOU, RA-VENN.
YOU TOO, NOVA PRIME. SEEMS LIKE FOREVER SINCE WE STOOD SIDE BY SIDE AND WATCHED ULTRON FALL.
SO TELL US...

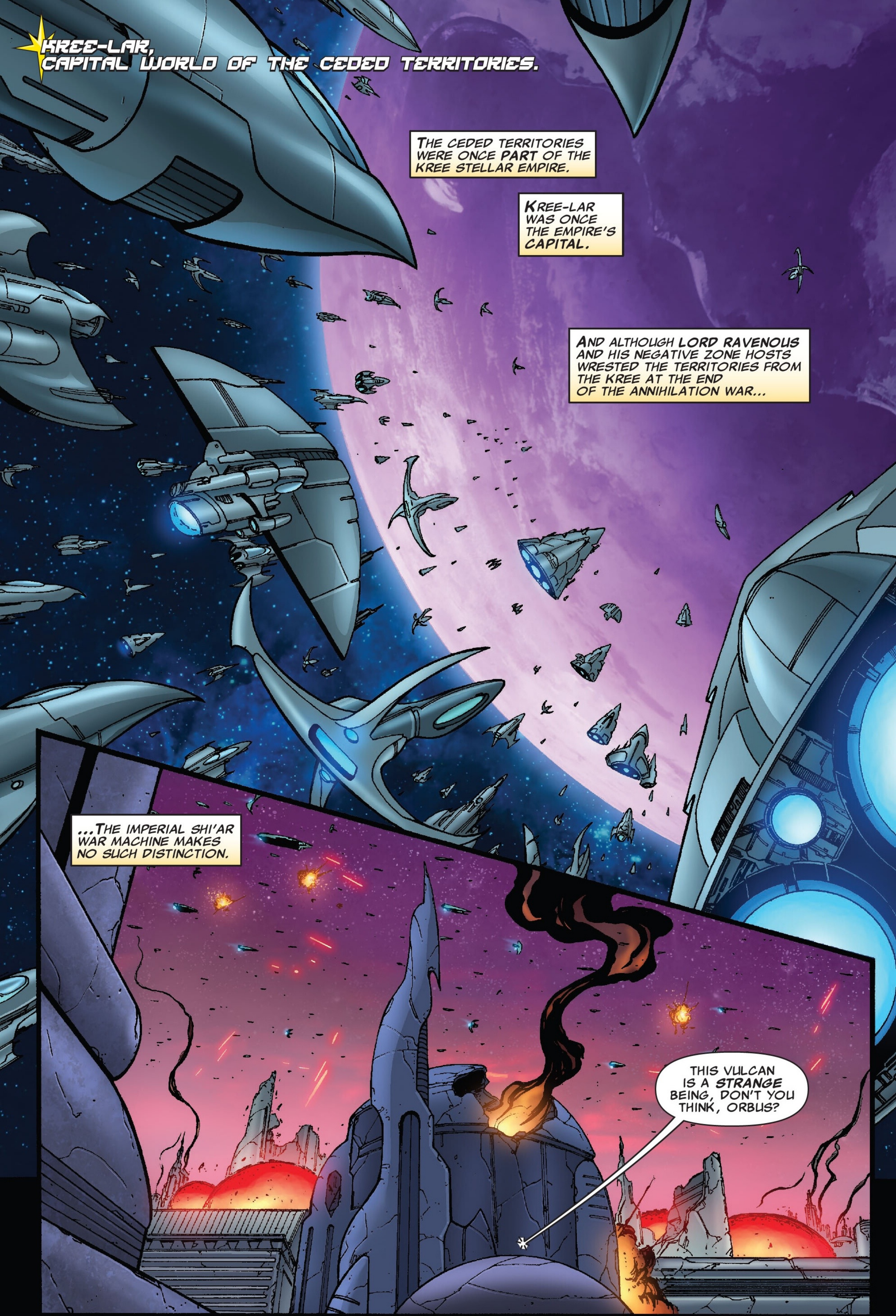
"...WHY HAVE YOU INTERRUPTED OUR WAR?"
WE'VE MOVED MOST OF THE CASUALTIES INTO THIS MEDICAL STATION.
THIS WAY.
QUBIT!
OH, JEEZ.
ONE OF YOURS, I TAKE IT?
QUBIT? CAN YOU HEAR ME? IT'S ME...IT'S RICH.
S-SUCH A PLEASURE TO SEE YOU, SIR.
I'M NOT R-REALLY IN PEAK FORM TODAY.
WHAT HAPPENED?
I...I AM SORRY TO SAY THAT MY MEMORY BANKS S-SEEM UNABLE TO SUPPLY YOU WITH AN ANSWER.

OH, COME OFF IT, QUBIT! YOU'RE ALWAYS PIPING UP WITH SOME BORING OLD REMINISCENCE!
AM I?
QUBIT... MY BROTHER ROBBIE...DO YOU KNOW WHERE HE IS?
I REMEMBER... WE CAME HERE... L-LOOKING FOR COHORT 86. LITTLE SUKI YUMIKO.
ROBBIE WAS SO DETERMINED TO HELP. MY MEMORY BANKS RECALL IT DISTINCTLY...
OH... NO, THEY DON'T.
QUBIT? WHAT ABOUT ROBBIE?
WE WERE TOGETHER. WE WERE LOOKING. THEN THE INHUMAN COUNTER-OFFENSIVE BEGAN.
MY MEMORY BANKS RECALL A BRIGHT LIGHT. THEN...
...NOTHING.

NOVA PRIME?
WE'VE FOUND SOMETHING I THINK YOU SHOULD SEE.


OH GOD.

OH GOD, NO. ARE--ARE THOSE...
...HELMETS?


KREE-LAR, CAPITAL WORLD OF THE CEDED TERRITORIES.
THE CEDED TERRITORIES WERE ONCE PART OF THE KREE STELLAR EMPIRE.
KREE-LAR WAS ONCE THE EMPIRE'S CAPITAL.
AND ALTHOUGH LORD RAVENOUS AND HIS NEGATIVE ZONE HOSTS WRESTED THE TERRITORIES FROM THE KREE AT THE END OF THE ANNIHILATION WAR...
...THE IMPERIAL SHI'AR WAR MACHINE MAKES NO SUCH DISTINCTION.
THIS VULCAN IS A STRANGE BEING, DON'T YOU THINK, ORBUS?

HOW SO, LORD RAVENOUS?

I WOULD HAVE *HAPPILY* ALLIED WITH HIM AGAINST THE HATED KREE, BUT INSTEAD HE MAKES STRANGE BEDFELLOWS OF US BY ATTACKING US *BOTH.*

HIS HUNGER FOR POWER IS SO *UNSUBTLE*--AND HIS INVASION SO *WHOLESALE*--HE HAS, IN EFFECT, *ALLIED* US WITH OUR *OWN* ENEMIES.

DO YOU SUPPOSE HE IS A LITTLE BIT *INSANE*, ORBUS?

THAT *HAD* STRUCK ME, LORD.

MAKE YOUR REPORT.

LORD, THOUGH THE SHI'AR FORCES *CONTINUE* TO PRESS HARD, WE ARE RESISTING.

THE ASSAULT IS *FALTERING.* WE EXPECT VICTORY WITHIN ANOTHER DAY-CYCLE.

THE MAMMALS WILL BE *EXTERMINATED*, OR ELSE DRIVEN FROM THE SURFACE OF KREE-LAR.

EMPEROR VULCAN HAS *OVER-STRETCHED* HIMSELF BY TRYING TO ANNEX THE CEDED TERRITORIES ALONG WITH THE KREE EMPIRE.

HMMH. MAD MAN. NO *FINESSE.*

ORBUS, I THINK I--

WHAT?!
KRAK!
AGHHH!
WHO DARES--?!
CHHHHMMM
ALARM! ALARM! OUR LORD IS ATTACKED!
ZZSSHHHHH
OUR LORD IS ATTA--
EHHKKK!

UGHN! WHAT ARE YOU?
UGHNNN!
KRAAM
STRONTIAN, OF THE SHI'AR IMPERIAL GUARD PRAETORIANS.

I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF EMPEROR VULCAN, AND HE HAS PERSONALLY SENT ME HERE TO GREET YOU.
HIS MESSAGE BEGINS...
GKK... KKK...
"LORD RAVENOUS, I COMMEND YOU. KUDOS. YOUR HOSTS HAVE SUCCEEDED IN DENYING MY ADVANCE.
"I HAVE, THEREFORE, NO CHOICE BUT TO CRIPPLE THE CEDED TERRITORIES BY MEANS OF ESH'TYL, OR DECAPITATION STRIKE.
GAAAHHH!
"I HAVE SENT STRONTIAN TO PERFORM THIS. SHE IS QUITE SOMETHING. YOUR DEATH WILL BE MAGNIFICENT.
"HUGS AND KISSES, VULCAN."

EGHH!
OR SOMETHING TO THAT EFFECT.
ZZRRCH
YOU'VE NO IDEA WHO YOU'RE FACING, ASSASSIN!
I'LL SNAP OFF YOUR HEAD AND SEND IT BACK TO YOUR LUNATIC MASTER ON A PLATE!
OH, LORD RAVENOUS... DON'T YOU GET IT YET?
I'M STRONTIAN. COUSIN OF GLADIATIOR.
GNNGHHH!
KRAK-A-THOOM

THE ONLY REASON YOU'RE NOT DEAD YET...
ARRGHH!
KRATSSH
...IS THAT I HAVEN'T FINISHED PLAYING.
UHHN! UHHN! HHHN-HNN...
NOW...WHICH ORGAN SHALL I TEAR OUT FIRST?
HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR SPLEEN?
UHK!
WHAMM

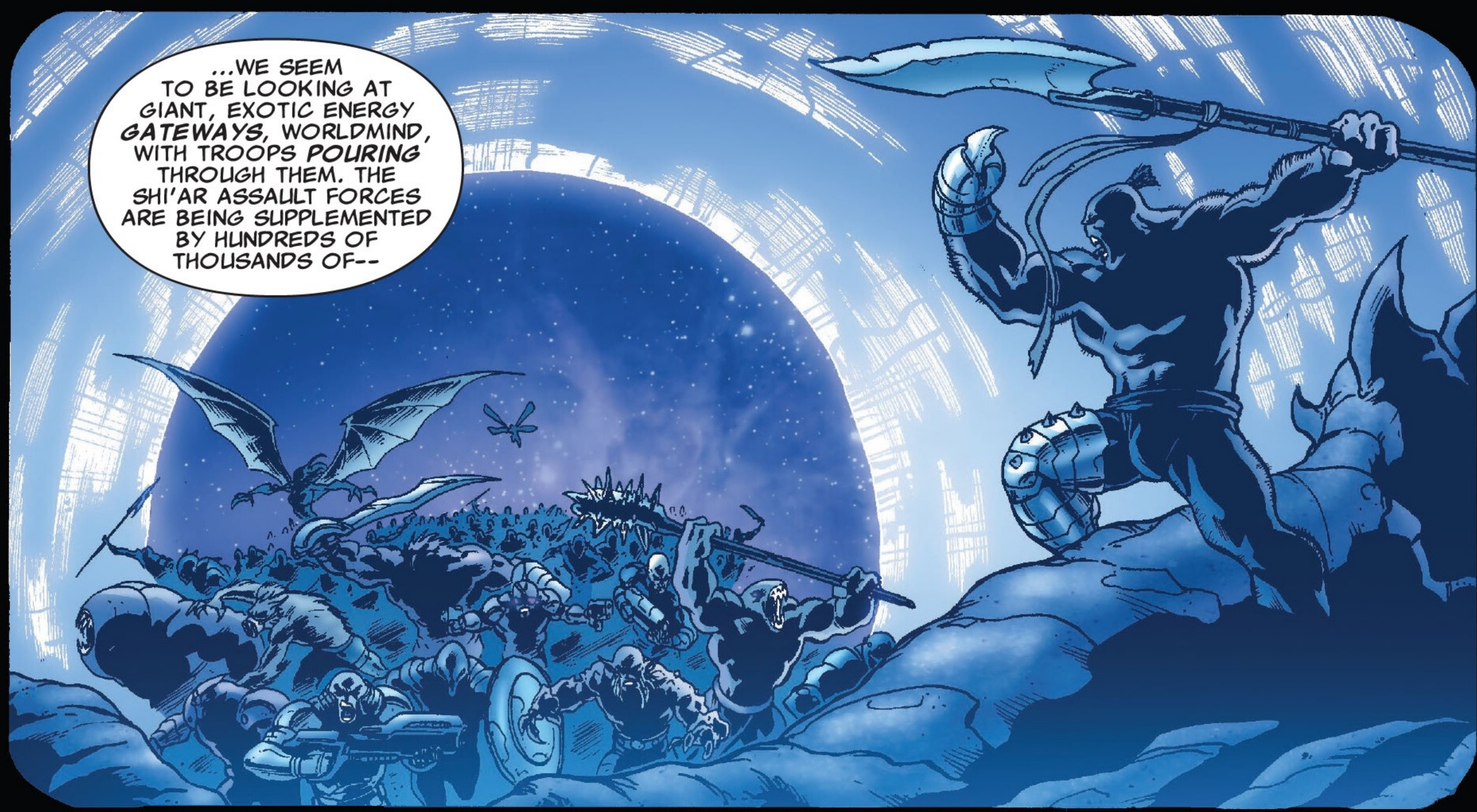
W-WHO ARE YOU?
I AM NOVA CENTURION ROBERT RIDER.
YOU'RE UNDER MY PROTECTION.
AND THIS MURDERER IS UNDER ARREST FOR WAR CRIMES.

NOVA 27

ATTENTION. ATTENTION. STATUS UPDATE.
NOVA PRIME RICHARD RIDER, YOU ARE TWENTY SECONDS AWAY FROM STARGATE EXIT OVER THE PLANET KREE-LAR, CAPITAL WORLD OF THE CEDED TERRITORIES.
BIOANALYSIS SCANS OF YOU AND YOUR COMPANIONS, CENTURION IRANI RAEL AND CENTURION MORROW, INDICATE ACCEPTABLY HIGH LEVELS OF ADRENALIN COMMENSURATE WITH--
SPD % 83
SKIP AHEAD, WORLDMIND. JUST TELL ME YOU'RE STILL GETTING A SIGNAL FROM THAT SUIT TRACER.
ITS SOURCE IS DEFINITELY THE MAIN CITADEL OF KREE-LAR, AND IT IS CONFIRMED AS A NOVA CENTURION SUIT TRACER.
GOTTA BE ROBBIE...
I AM UNABLE TO AUTHENTICATE TRACER IDENTITY DUE TO DISRUPTION.
RIDER? DID YOU HEAR ME? IT MIGHT NOT BE YOUR BROTHER.
YEAH, I HEARD YOU, KO-REL. SO WHAT'S THE SITREP ON KREE-LAR?
INTERCEPTS OF THE INTELFEED SUGGEST THAT SIGNIFICANT SHI'AR DISPOSITIONS ARE NOW ASSAULTING THE CEDED TERRITORIES.
RIDER, YOU'RE GOING HEAD-ON INTO A WAR ZONE AT MAXIMUM VELOCITY.
JUST WATCH WHAT I DO FOR AN ENCORE.
IRANI? MORROW? STARGATE EXIT MATCH IN THREE, TWO, ONE...

FIRST CITY, KREE-LAR.
CAPITAL WORLD OF THE CEDED TERRITORIES.
BLUE BLAZES!
OOOHH!
SHOCK & AWE

GUYS! DROP SPEED AND BLEED SOME POWER TO YOUR SHIELDS!
HEAD DOWN! DOWN!
OKAY, THIS IS REALLY BAD.
NOVA PRIME, WHAT THE D'AST ARE THOSE?
NOT SURE. SOME KIND OF COSMIC... GATEWAYS?
WORLDMIND, CAN YOU RUN ANALYSIS?
-ERIOUSLY BREAKI--ON ME, RIDER--
--AY AGAIN, I--
DAMMIT.
BOOSTING VISOR MAGNIFICATION.
WORLDMIND, IF YOU CAN HEAR ME, I'M NOT GETTING ANYTHING CLEAN FROM YOU.
WE'VE GOT SOMETHING HERE...


...WE SEEM TO BE LOOKING AT GIANT, EXOTIC ENERGY GATEWAYS, WORLDMIND, WITH TROOPS POURING THROUGH THEM. THE SHI'AR ASSAULT FORCES ARE BEING SUPPLEMENTED BY HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF--

OH, YOU'RE KIDDING ME.

WHAT? WHAT?
THEY'RE COMING FROM THE NEGATIVE ZONE.
EMPEROR VULCAN HAS SOMEHOW GOT HIMSELF NEGATIVE ZONE REINFORCEMENTS!
WHICH WE ARE NOT INTENDING TO ENGAGE, RIGHT?
NOVA PRIME, THERE ARE ONLY THREE OF US AND WE'RE RUNNING A SMASH AND GRAB MISSION IN THE HOPE OF RESCUING YOUR BROTHER.
THIS IS A WAR WE'RE JUST GOING TO LOOK AT AND HAVE BRIEF MEMORIES OF, RIGHT?
NOW, MORROW, DOES THAT SOUND LIKE ANY FUN?

WAIT. I KNOW THAT LOOK IN YOUR EYE. THAT "WE'VE GOT TO FIX THIS" LOOK.
DON'T WORRY. THE BEST WE CAN DO IS SNATCH ROBBIE AND THEN GET A WARNING OUT TO EARTH, AND TO THE GALACTIC COUNCIL.
THE LAST TIME THE NEGATIVE ZONE SPILLED INTO OUR 'VERSE, WE CALLED IT THE ANNIHILATION WAR.
IRANI?
I'M STILL PICKING UP THAT TRACER SIGNAL, NOVA PRIME.
BEARING 17866, NINE HUNDRED AND FOUR STANDARD UNITS FROM HERE IN THE HEART OF THE CITADEL.
CAN WE GET A VOICE LINK? TEXT-TRANSMIT?
NEGATIVE. IT'S STILL DISTORTED. IT COMES AND GOES.
FOLLOW MY LEAD, YOU TWO. FAST AND LOW.
NOVA PRIME, IF IT ISN'T YOUR BROTHER, WH--
IT'S ROBBIE. IT IS ABSOLUTELY, DEFINITELY GOING TO BE ROBBIE, AND NOTHING'S GONNA ST--
UGHNNN!
AGHHH!
OWWW...
WHAT... WHAT JUST HIT US?

THAT WOULD BE ME.
KING BLASTAAR. AND YOU WILL KNEEL BEFORE ME.
BLASTAAR?!

KREE-LAR.
THE THRONE CITADEL.
THIS.
IS.
UHHN.
FUTILE.
TAKE YOUR.
GRAVITY FORCE.
OFF.
ME.
DON'T YOU DARE, HUMAN! SHE IS A MONSTER! SHE'LL KILL US BOTH! I--
I KNOW WHO SHE IS, SIR.
HER NAME IS STRONTIAN, SHE'S THE SAME RACE AS GLADIATOR, AND SHE'S LEADER OF THE SHI'AR'S PRAETORIAN ELITE.

I'VE NO INTENTION OF LETTING HER MOVE A FINGER OR EVEN OPEN HER EYELIDS.
SHE'D RIP OFF MY HEAD OR BURN ME TO ASHES WITH HER HEAT VISION.
JUST LIKE SHE DID TO A COHORT OF MY FELLOW CENTURIONS ON NIL-RAST.
SO.
NHHH. WHAT?
THERE'S A.
WAR ON.
THEY SURRENDERED TO YOU. THAT MAKES IT A WAR CRIME, AND I'M TAKING YOU IN.
DON'T MAKE.
ME.
LAUGH.
I AM RAVENOUS, LORD OF THE CEDED TERRITORIES.
YEAH, I GUESSED AS MUCH. LOOKS LIKE YOUR REIGN IS OVER, SIR.
SHI'AR FORCES WILL OVERWHELM THE CITADEL IN THE NEXT FEW HOURS.
ACCORDING TO ARTICLE SIXTY EIGHT OF THE GALACTIC COUNCIL TREATY, THE NOVA CORPS OFFERS YOU PROTECTION OUT OF THIS WAR ZONE.
DO SO. NOW! I WON'T STAY HERE TO DIE! PROVIDE THIS VAUNTED PROTECTION!

THING IS, I CAN'T ACTUALLY MOVE. SHE'S WAY MORE POWERFUL THAN ME.
IT'S TAKING EVERY SCRAP OF MY CONCENTRATION TO MAINTAIN THE STRUCTURE OF THE GRAVIMETRIC BUBBLE THAT'S KEEPING HER PINNED.
ONE WRONG MOVE AND SHE'LL SHATTER IT.
AND THEN WE'D BE LIKE POOR SUKI... DEAD.
SO WE JUST STAND HERE?
I DEACTIVATED MY SUIT TRACER SO I COULD RUN SILENT ON STRONTIAN'S TRAIL.
NOW IT'S BACK ON AND SENDING AN 8X8 ALARM. THE CORPS WILL HEAR ME. THE WORLDMIND WILL HEAR ME. SOMEONE WILL ALREADY BE ON THEIR WAY TO HELP US.
WE'VE JUST GOT TO HOLD TIGHT UNTIL THEY GET HERE.
HA. HA. HA. HA!

NEARBY...
YOU'RE GOING TO FIGHT ME?
DISRESPECTFUL AND STUPID!
MORROW! IRANI! STOP!
UGHH!
SHA-KOOM
OWW!
NHF!
BLASTAAR! STOP THIS! IT'S ME, RICHARD RIDER!

I KNOW. THAT'S WHY I SWATTED YOU OUT OF THE SKY.
I WANTED TO GREET MY OLD ALLY.
OH, NICE...SOME HELLO!
IRANI! MORROW! BREAK OFF!
WE CAN'T DEFEAT HIM! CAN'T YOU SEE? HE'S GOT THE COSMIC CONTROL ROD!
BLASTAAR! PLEASE! WE WERE ALLIES ONCE! WE BATTLED SIDE BY SIDE!
I HAVEN'T COME HERE TO FIGHT YOU!
I'M JUST TRYING TO RESCUE MY BROTHER!

YOUR BROTHER?
HE'S HERE IN THE THRONE CITADEL, CAUGHT UP IN THIS. I JUST WANT TO GET HIM OUT.

THAT'S ALL?
I AM A KING, RIDER. I AM LEARNING THE REGAL QUALITIES OF GRACE AND MERCY.
I'LL GIVE YOU FIFTEEN MINUTES, FOR OLD TIME'S SAKE. I'LL HOLD MY ZONE TROOPS BACK THAT LONG.

AFTER THAT, I WILL RAZE RAVENOUS'S PRECIOUS CASTLE TO THE GROUND. IT'S TIME HE LEARNED WHO THE TRUE POWER IN THE NEGATIVE ZONE IS.
FIFTEEN MINUTES, THEN THE CITADEL'S DUST. YOU UNDERSTAND?
YEAH.
BY THE WAY, HOW DID YOU WIND UP WITH ANNIHILUS'S COSMIC CONTROL ROD?
DIVINE RIGHT. I AM A KING, AND IT IS A KING'S WEAPON.

WELL, THANKS FOR THE FIFTEEN MINUTES...YOUR MAJESTY.

WHAT IS THIS, KING BLASTAAR? YOU GIVE THE CENTURIONS A HEAD START?
WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE YOUR ALLIES!
YOU SHI'AR PRAETORIANS MUST LEARN NOT TO BARK AT ME.
I WAS JUST ENJOYING A MOMENT OF SPORT.
I'VE THROWN THE CENTURIONS INTO THE MIX BECAUSE I THOUGHT WE COULD HAVE SOME FUN. LIKE IN THE ARENAS BACK ON GRAALLAK.
OUR LEADER, STRONTIAN, IS IN THE THRONE CITADEL. YOU KNEW THAT. SHE WENT IN TO REMOVE LORD RAVENOUS. WHAT ABOUT HER?
I TOLD THE NOVA PRIME I'D HOLD MY TROOPS OFF FOR FIFTEEN MINUTES. I'M A KING, AND A KING KEEPS HIS WORD.
BUT YOU'RE NOT TECHNICALLY MY TROOPS, ARE YOU?
I'LL GIVE YOU FIFTEEN MINUTES TOO.
CENTURION, I HAVE THE SOLUTION TO YOUR PRISONER PROBLEM.

DIE! DIE! DIE!
PLEASE. STOP. IT. TICKLES.
BADOON'S BREATH!
SHE'S STRONTIAN, SIR. WHAT PART OF PRACTICALLY INVULNERABLE WAS CONFUSING YOU?
I--
ALSO? HIGH YIELD LASER FIRE'S NOT ACTUALLY HELPFUL WHEN I'M TRYING TO KEEP THIS GRAV-SOLID FOCUSED!
PLEASE. IT'S TAKEN EVERYTHING I'VE GOT.
YOU'RE. STARTING. TO. SLIP.

I-I'M FINE.
YOUR.
NOSE.
IS.
BLEEDING.
GREAT MAKERS! HUMAN, HOLD YOURSELF TOGETHER!
YOU'RE.
SO.
TIRED.
WILL YOU SHUT--
ROBBIE? LITTLE BRO, CAN YOU HEAR ME?
RICH? RICH IS THAT YOU?

ROBBIE, THANK GOD!
GUYS, I'VE GOT ROBBIE ON VOICE!
THANK THE MAKER!
ROBBIE, STAY PUT! WE'RE COMING IN FOR YOU!
QUICK AS YOU CAN, BRO. I'M IN A TRICKY SITUATION HERE.
I'VE ARRESTED THE SHI'AR, STRONTIAN, FOR WAR CRIMES, BUT I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH LONGER SHE'LL STAY ARRESTED.
YOU'VE WHAT?!

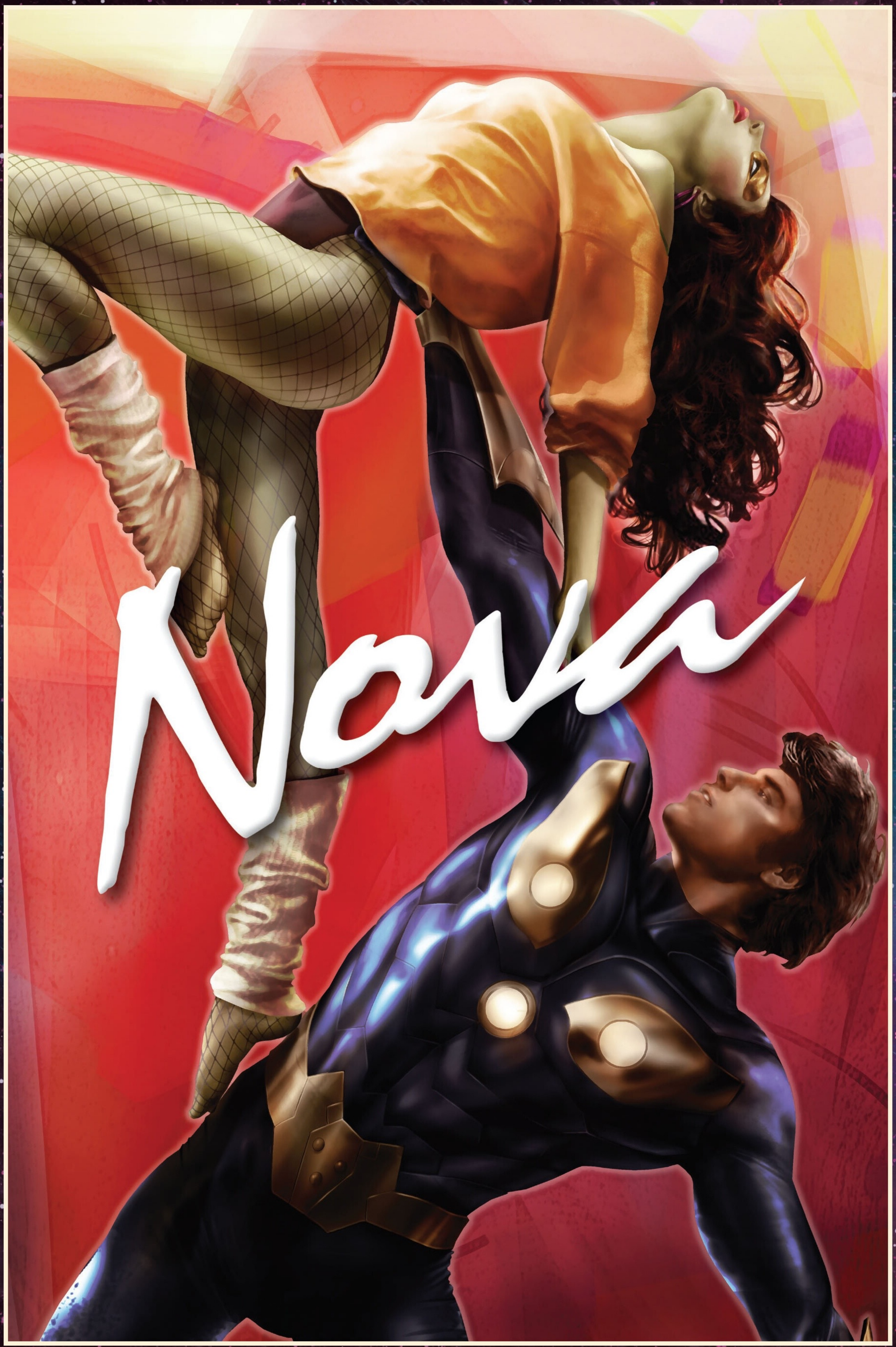
I HAD TO COME AFTER HER, RICH! SHE MURDERED SUKI! I WAS SO--
I'M SORRY, RICH. I'VE CAUSED A WHOLE STACK OF TROUBLE, HAVEN'T I?
I SHOULD NEVER HAVE PULLED A STUNT LIKE THIS.
ARE YOU KIDDING? ROBBIE, I'M PROUD OF YOU.
A THING LIKE THAT? YOU'VE DONE A HECK OF A JOB!
ROBBIE?
ROBBIE?!

OH GOD!
RICHA--
ROBBIE!
ROBBIE!
NOVA PRIME!
IRANI, FOLLOW HIM!

BA-KOOM!
I'VE COME FOR MY BROTHER. YOU WILL HAND HIM OVER OR I'LL BURN YOU WHERE YOU STAND.
OH DEAR LORD...

...ROBBIE?
SHARRA AND KY'THRI, HOW MANY MORE OF YOU IDIOTS HAVE I GOT TO KILL?

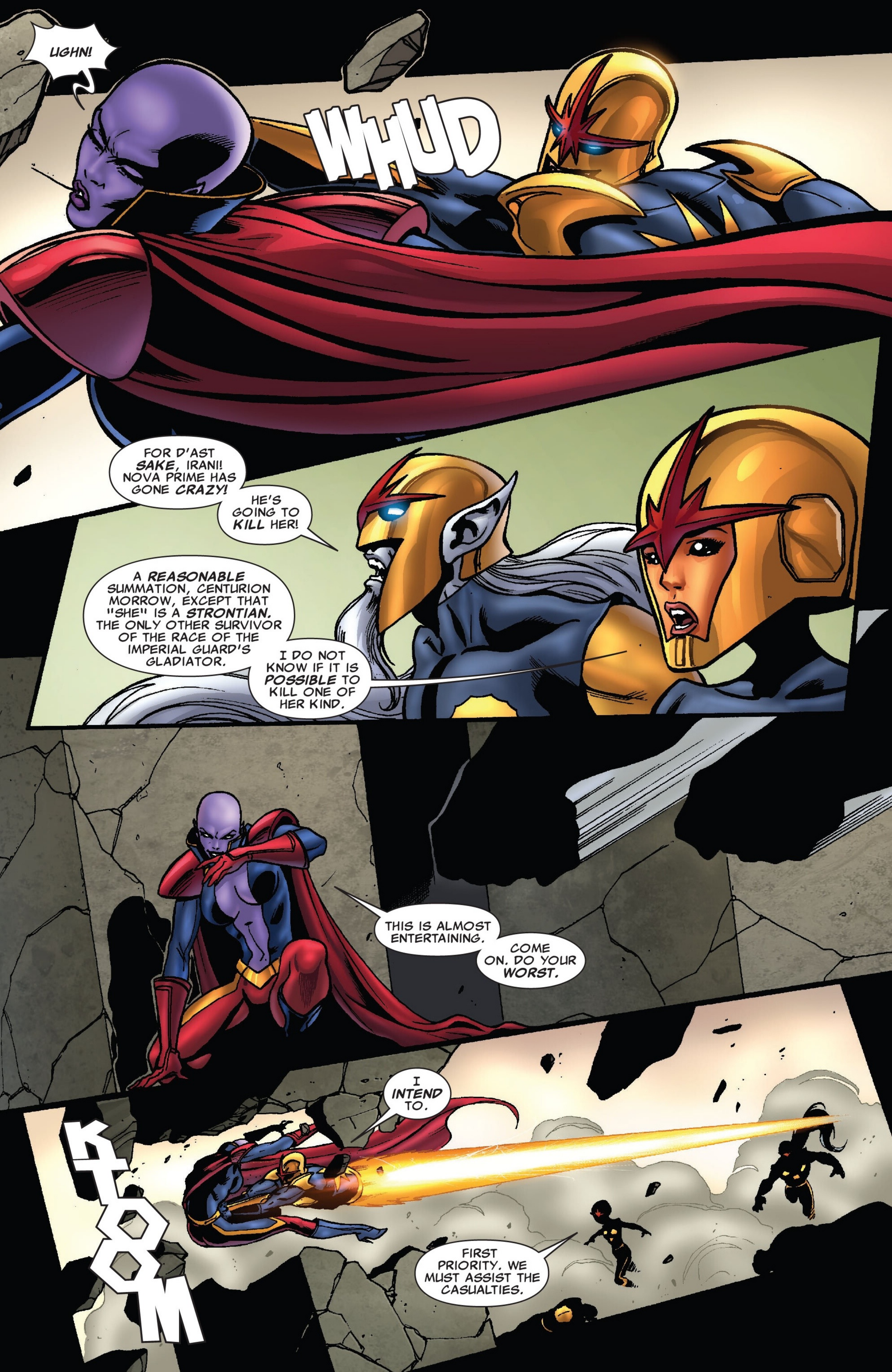
ROBBLE!



Nova #26 '80s decade variant by ALINA URUSOV

NOVA 28

WAR CRIMES
GET YOUR HANDS OFF MY BROTHER!


UGHN!
WHUD
FOR D'AST SAKE, IRANI! NOVA PRIME HAS GONE CRAZY!
HE'S GOING TO KILL HER!
A REASONABLE SUMMATION, CENTURION MORROW, EXCEPT THAT "SHE" IS A STRONTIAN. THE ONLY OTHER SURVIVOR OF THE RACE OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD'S GLADIATOR.
I DO NOT KNOW IF IT IS POSSIBLE TO KILL ONE OF HER KIND.
THIS IS ALMOST ENTERTAINING.
COME ON. DO YOUR WORST.
I INTEND TO.
KTOOM
FIRST PRIORITY. WE MUST ASSIST THE CASUALTIES.

Y-YOU'RE NOVA CORPS?
EASY THERE, SIR.
I WAS PROMISED YOUR PROTECTION!
DON'T WORRY, LORD RAVENOUS.
MORROW!
I'VE GOT A VITAL TRACE! ROBERT IS STILL BREATHING!
NOVA PRIME, YOUR BROTHER IS ALIVE!
HE'S ALIVE?! ROBBIE?!
MORE THAN YOU'LL BE...
...I AM XENITH! STRONTIAN BORN!
YOUR POWERS ARE NOTHING TO ME!
WHA-DOOM!
UKKKG!

UH-OH. UGLY.

NOVA PRIME IS IN MAJOR NEED OF BACK-UP.

AGREED. WE...

...WE MAY BE IN MAJOR NEED OF BACK-UP, TOO.

22X2

THE UNCREATED

PIT 20

THE ONLY THING YOU'LL NEED WHEN THE PRAETORIANS HAVE FINISHED WITH YOU...

...IS TOE-TAGS.

NOW I WILL BEGIN YOUR INSTRUCTION, MOST VAUNTED NOVA PRIME.

FIRST I WILL TEACH YOU HOW TO SCREAM.

THEN I WILL TEACH YOU HOW TO BLEED.

UGHHHF!

ACTUALLY, I WAS JUST GIVING MYSELF SOME INSTRUCTION...I LOOKED UP YOUR SPECIES ON MY SUIT'S NOVAPEDIA INDEX.

AND...?

BLUE BLAZES, YOU GUYS ARE TOUGH!

THAT IS, YOU'RE PHYSICALLY TOUGH, BUT THE REAL TRICK IS YOUR MIND.

YOUR STRENGTH IS PSIONICALLY REINFORCED.

GNHHH!
REALLY? AND WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS?
NNH! I G-GUESS THE MOST OBVIOUS LESSON WOULD BE...
...NEVER GET WITHIN HEAD-BUTTING RANGE OF ANYONE WEARING A PSIONIC DAMPENER IN HIS BUCKET HAT!
KLANG
UGHHHHK!
'CAUSE IT SHORTS OUT YOUR PSIONICS, AND TAKES AWAY THE MENTAL FOCUS THAT MAKES YOU ALL-POWERFUL AND INVULNERABLE.
TEMPORARILY, OF COURSE.
AND--
--WORLDMIND, FULL GRAVIMETRIC TO RIGHT FIST--
--TEMPORARILY IS ALL I NEED!
WHAM

AN UNCREATED, EH? HOW PLEASANT.
SHOULDN'T YOU BE SOMEWHERE, TRYING TO ASSASSINATE SOMEONE ELSE'S BELIEF SYSTEM?
GRAAAHH!
OH, AND EJECTING SPINE-QUILLS, TOO? THIS REALLY IS "BE MEAN TO MORROW" DAY.
WELL, UNCREATED, BEHOLD...
...GRAVIMETRIC POWERS. STANDARD ISSUE FOR ALL CENTURIONS.
DON'T THROW STUFF AT ME...
...UNLESS YOU WANT IT THROWN RIGHT BACK ATCHA.
THUK
SCHUK
THUK
THUK
SCHUK
AGHH!

A TECHNOLOGICAL ORGANISM. BIO-MECHANISTIC HYBRIDIZATION!
FROM A PURELY TECHNICAL PERSPECTIVE, QUITE FASCINATING.
AND IN SO MANY OTHER WAYS, ENTIRELY LETHAL.
NOTED.
YOU'LL PARDON ME, PN'ZO, IF I DON'T STAND STILL.
YOU WARRANT A CLOSER INSPECTION.
IS THIS THE ACCESS POINT FOR YOUR NEURAL CORTEX?
GET OFF ME!
HOW WILL IT REACT WHEN EXPOSED TO SIGNIFICANT LEVELS OF RAW POWER?
SKZZKT
LET'S FIND OUT.
AGGHH!

I CONCLUDE THE ANSWER IS "NOT FAVORABLY."
I--
K.SSSSSS!
AAAHHH! NO!
PUT THE TEETH AWAY, SYMBIOTE.
ZZKOW
AHHHH!
YOU OKAY, IRANI?
JUST SHAKEN, NOVA PRIME.
GET BEHIND ME, IT'S COMING BACK FOR DESSERT.
LOAD UP A TARGET-SPECIFIC GRAVIMETRIC BEAM, IRANI. YOU AIM FOR THE HOST...

...I'LL HIT THE SYMBIOTE!
KSSSSS!
GAAAHHH!
ACTUALLY SEPARATING THEM WOULD HAVE KILLED THE HOST, BUT--
BUT STRETCHING THEIR UNION TO BREAKING POINT INDUCED ENOUGH SHOCK TRAUMA TO RENDER THEM BOTH INSENSIBLE.
THIS MAN NEEDS EXPERT MEDICAL ATTENTION TO REMOVE THE SYMBIOTE.
HIS NAME IS RAZA LONGKNIFE. HE WAS A STARJAMMER UNTIL THE SYMBIOTE INFECTED HIM.
THE STARJAMMERS MAY BE PIRATES, BUT THEY'VE ALSO BEEN ALLIES. RAZA DESERVES OUR RESPECT...AND TO BE SEPARATED FROM THIS MONSTER.
WE'RE TAKING HIM WITH US. WE'RE TAKING THEM ALL WITH US. ARREST OR PROTECTIVE CUSTODY, WHICHEVER APPLIES.
WE'RE DOING THIS BY THE BOOK. IT'S TIME WE REMINDED THIS GALAXY THERE'S STILL LAW WEST OF THE PECOS.
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT THAT MEANS, PRIME, BUT IT SOUNDED GOOD.
THERE IS A SLIGHT SNAG, THOUGH. TO TAKE THEM ALL WITH US, WE'VE GOT TO LEAVE...

"...AND IT DOESN'T LOOK AS IF *KING BLASTAAR'S* GOING TO LET US."

OH BLUE BLAZES.

KING BLASTAAR'S NEGATIVE ZONE FORCES SEEM TO HAVE OVERRUN THE ENTIRE *CITY*, NOVA PRIME.

YEAH. I GOT EYES, IRANI.

I WAS MERELY--

AND *DON'T* CALL HIM "*KING*." THAT MAKES ME WINCE LIKE FINGERNAILS DOWN A BLACKBOARD.

THE CORPS PROMISED ME PROTECTION AS A *POLITICAL FUGITIVE*! I *DEMAND* YOU--

OH, *SHUT IT*! I'LL DO EVERYTHING IN MY *POWER* TO PROTECT YOU, RAVENOUS.

I'M GUESSING YOU'RE *NOT* ON KING BLASTAAR'S CHRISTMAS CARD LIST.

"KING BLASTAAR." DAMN, NOW I'M DOING IT.

SUIT MIC TO AMPLIFY.

KING BLASTAAR! THIS IS NOVA PRIME! THE NOVA CORPS HAS CONCLUDED ITS OPERATIONS ON KREE-LAR.

IN ACCORDANCE WITH GALACTIC COUNCIL WAR TIME AGREEMENTS, YOU WILL GRANT ME PEACEFUL WITHDRAW FROM THE CEDED TERRITORIES WITH MY COLLEAGUES AND THE INDIVIDUALS WE HAVE IN CUSTODY.

H-HEM!

YOU CAN LEAVE. YOU AND YOUR CENTURIONS. BUT *NO* ONE ELSE. *NOT* YOUR PRISONERS. THEY *STAY*.

WE HAVE A DEAL, BLASTAAR! YOU GAVE ME YOUR WORD!

THINGS CHANGE. MY ZONE FORCES ATTACKED KREE-LAR AS *ALLIES* OF THE SHI'AR.

BUT I HAVE LEARNED THAT THE GREAT *WAR OF KINGS* IS OVER. THE SHI'AR HAVE *SURRENDERED.*

I AM MY *OWN* MAN NOW. AND I SAY *YOU* CAN GO, BUT YOUR PRISONERS STAY *HERE*, AS SPOILS OF MY VICTORY.

I REQUEST A PRIVATE AUDIENCE!

DO YOU INTEND TO *BEG?* I *LIKE* IT WHEN THEY BEG.

I INTEND TO KEEP MY VOICE DOWN SO THIS REMAINS BETWEEN *US.*

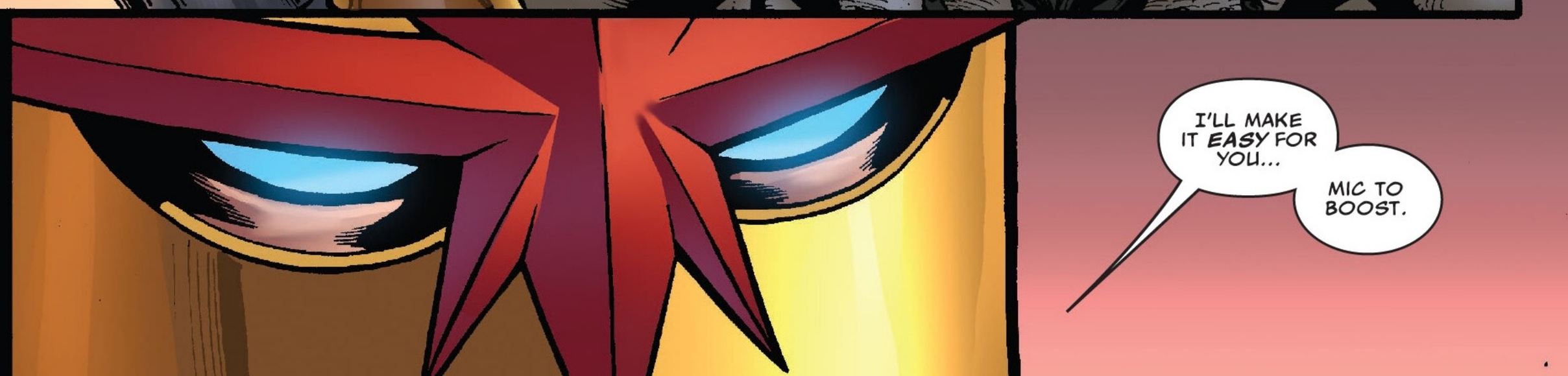
SO YOU'RE *KING* NOW, HUH?

YOU RULE THE ZONE. YOU'VE GOT THE COSMIC ROD. YOU'VE INVADED THE POSITIVE GALAXY, AND YOU'VE CONQUERED KREE-LAR.
YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY, BLASTAAR.
DO YOU HAVE A POINT?

I THINK YOU WANT TO BE A PLAYER. I THINK YOU WANT TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY. YOU WANT PEOPLE TO SAY, "KING BLASTAAR? HE'S A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH."
HERE'S HOW YOU START BUILDING THAT REPUTATION AS A PROPER KING.
RECOGNIZE THE AUTHORITY OF THE NOVA CORPS. ABIDE BY GALACTIC LAW AND SHOW THAT YOU'RE A MONARCH OF WISDOM AND COMPASSION...

...NOT SOME BERSERKER BARBARIAN FROM THE BOONIES. A PROPER KING. A QUALITY KING.
ALTERNATIVELY, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CONSIDER WHAT I DID TO THE LAST IDIOT WHO FACED ME WITH THE COSMIC ROD.
I TORE HIM INSIDE OUT, BLASTAAR. INSIDE OUT.
HNH.

YOU MAKE INTERESTING POINTS, NOVA.
BUT HOW DO I ACKNOWLEDGE THE CORPS AND NOT LOSE FACE IN FRONT OF MY WARRIORS?


I'LL MAKE IT EASY FOR YOU...
MIC TO BOOST.

KING BLASTAAR, THE NOVA CORPS APPRECIATES YOUR MERCY AND COMPASSION!
THIS GREAT AND VERY KINGLY ACT WILL BE NOTED IN OUR RECORDS. YOUR BENEVOLENCE AS A WISE RULER OF THE STARWAYS IS BOUNDLESS!
NOW TELL US WE CAN GO.
UHM...
YOU MAY GO! WITH MY KINGSOMELY BLESSING!
THANKS.
UNTIL NEXT TIME...YOUR MAJESTY.
YES, NOVA PRIME...
THERE WILL MOST CERTAINLY BE A NEXT TIME.

NU-XANDAR.

WELCOME BACK, RIDER.

DETENTION FACILITIES HAVE BEEN PREPARED FOR YOUR PRISONERS.

YOUR BROTHER HAS BEEN TAKEN DIRECTLY TO INTENSIVE CARE. REST ASSURED, HE IS STABLE.

SO, THE SHI'AR PRAETORIANS **AND** RAVENOUS OF THE CEDED TERRITORIES? THAT'S **QUITE** A HAUL.

I WANT THE PRAETORIANS PROCESSED FOR TRIAL BY THE GALACTIC COUNCIL.

AS FOR RAVENOUS, I THINK WE TELL THE KREE WE HAVE HIM AND SEE IF THEY WANT TO ***EXTRADITE.***

WHAT'S THE SITUATION ***HERE***, WORLDMIND?

THE WAR IS OVER. THE KREE DETONATED SOME KIND OF **SUPERWEAPON.***

IT'S CAUSED **MASSIVE** DEVASTATION. THE SHI'AR ARE SUING FOR PEACE.

*SEE WAR OF KINGS #6 -BLASTAAR BILL

FOR OUR PART, WE'VE SUCCESSFULLY DE-POWERED **ALL** THE SURVIVING NOVA RECRUITS AND RETURNED THEM TO THEIR HOMEWORLDS, AS PER YOUR ORDERS.

SO NOVA CORPS MEMBERSHIP IS CURRENTLY RUNNING IN **SINGLE** FIGURES.

QUBIT! FRAKTURE! IT'S SO GOOD TO SEE YOU!

TRE? LINDY? YOU GUYS HAVE BEEN ***GREAT.*** ABOVE AND ***BEYOND.***

GREAT TO SEE YOU BACK, NOVA PRIME.

WENDELL? MAN IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU, ***TOO!***

I ***HAD*** TO STAY AND HELP OUT, RICH. A LOT OF SCARED KIDS NEEDED TO BE TAKEN HOME.

I ***OWE*** YOU.

OH, I THINK WE'RE ***EVEN.***

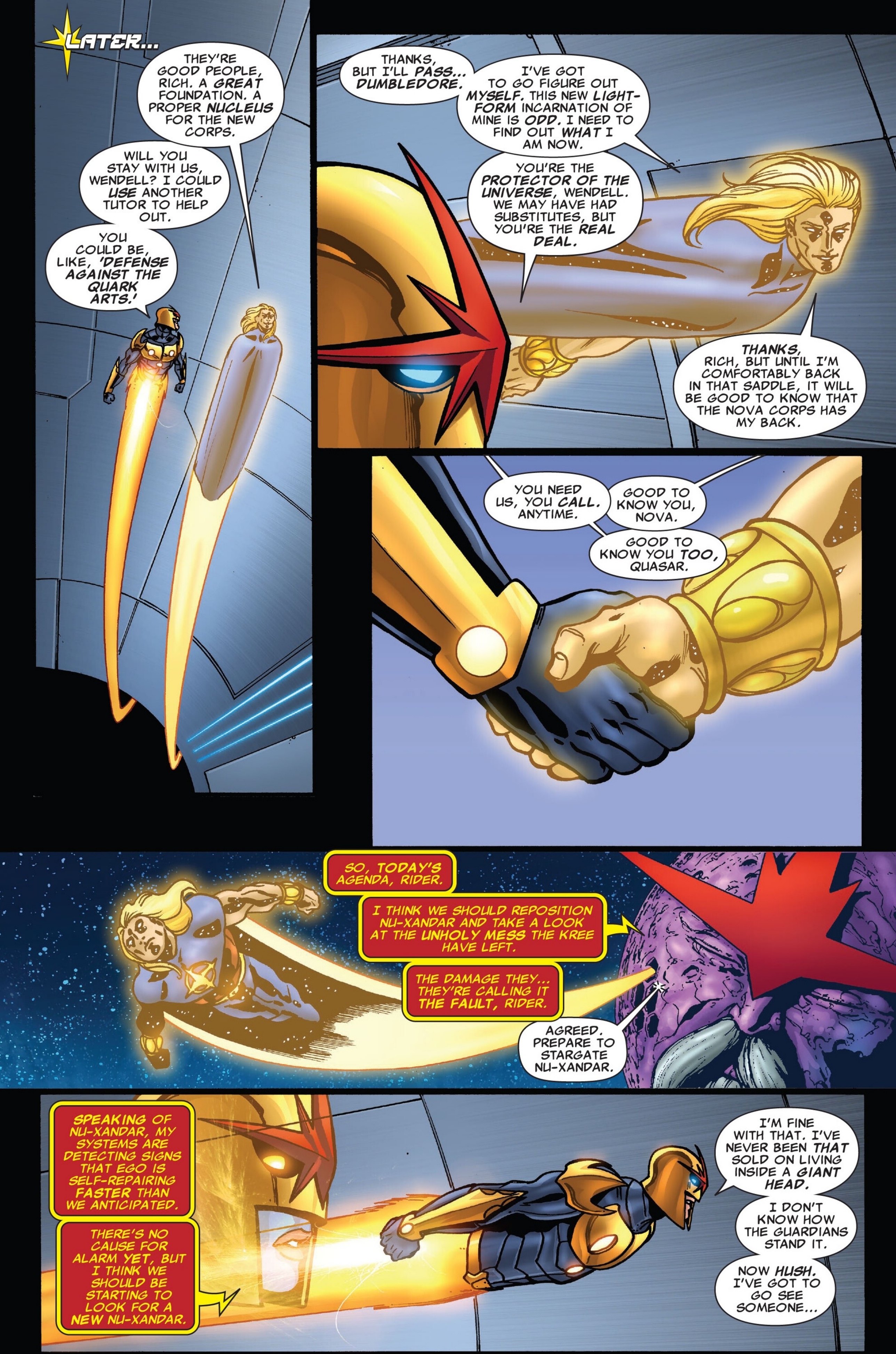
I HEAR YOU GUYS KICKED ***STRONTIAN*** ASS.

THAT'S ***BEYOND*** COOL.

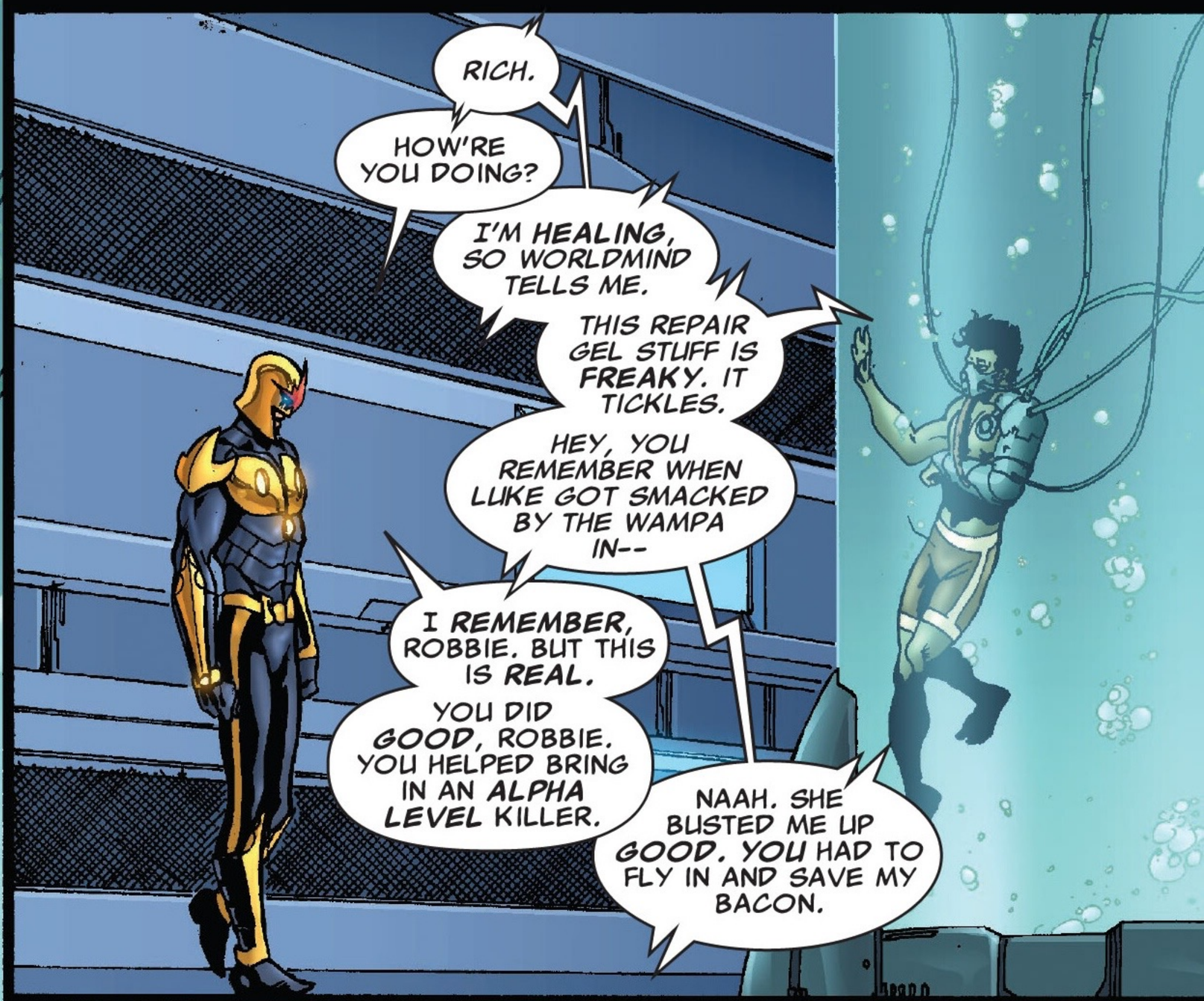
SPEAKING OF STRONTIANS AS A ***RACE***, MY DATABANKS ARE REMINDED OF AN OCCASION, AND THIS WOULD BE ***YEARS*** AGO, WHEN--

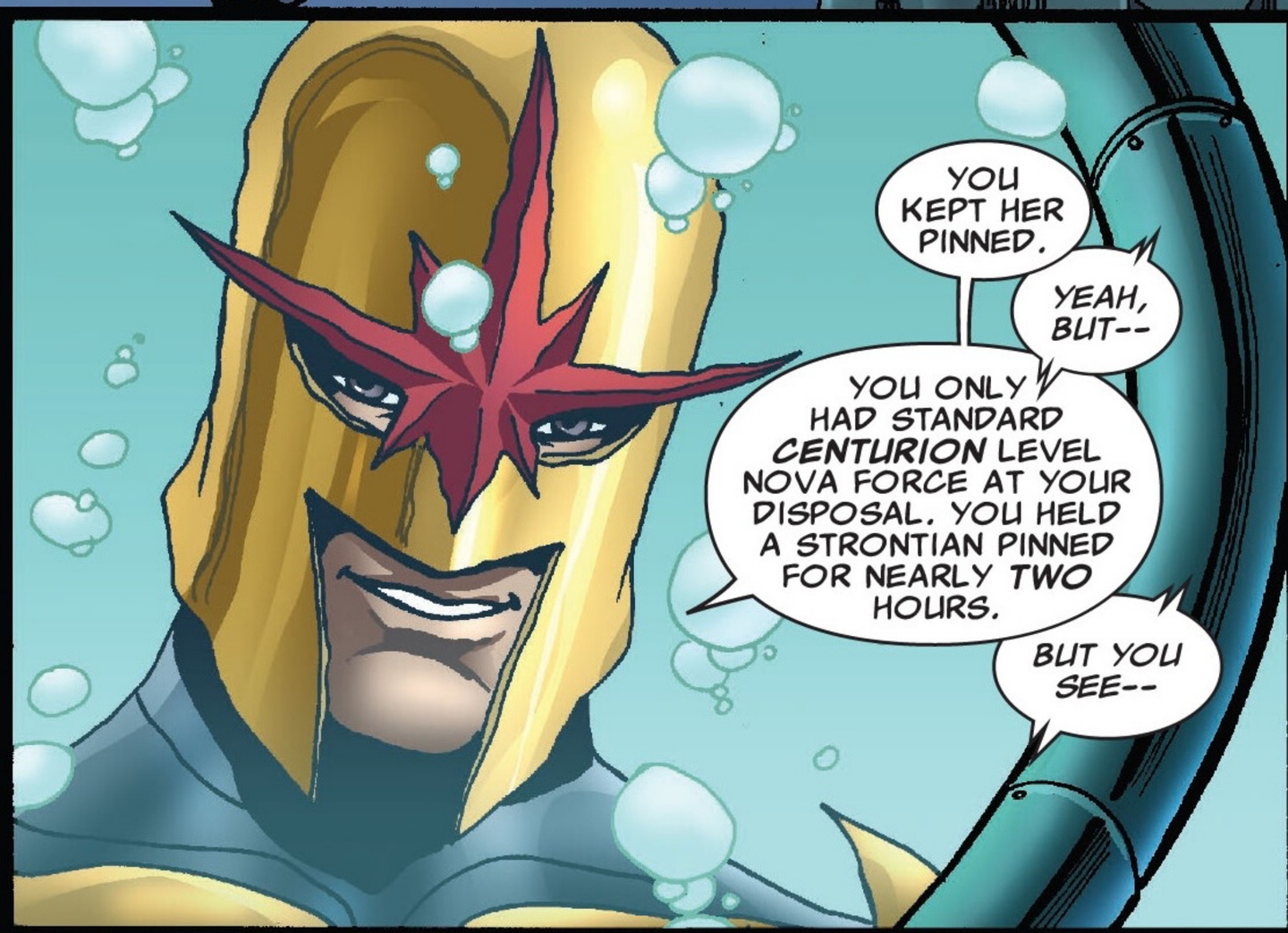
GIVE IT A ***REST***, QUBIT, MATE.

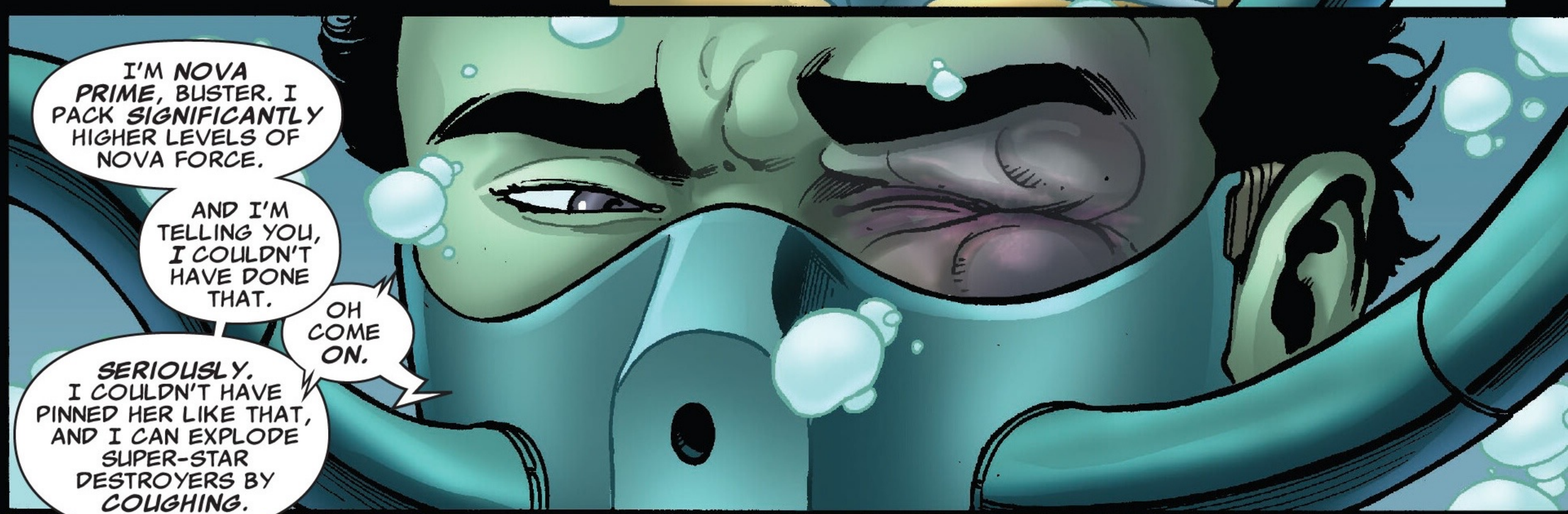
LISTEN, ALL OF YOU. I'VE BEEN DOING A LOT OF THINKING.
WHEN WORLDMIND STARTED TO REBUILD THE CORPS, I WAS AGAINST IT.
AND LET'S BE FAIR, I WAS ONLY ROWING WITH ONE PADDLE AT THE TIME.
YEAH, YEAH. THE BASIC IDEA WAS SOUND. THE GALAXY NEEDS PROTECTORS, PEOPLE WHO ARE PREPARED TO STAND UP FOR WHAT'S RIGHT.
MY RESERVATION WAS SIMPLE...
...WE WERE BUILDING TOO FAST. WE WERE RECRUITING YOUNG PEOPLE AND THROWING THEM INTO DANGER WITHOUT THE PROPER TRAINING OR PREP.
THIS WAR HAS PROVED ME RIGHT. I WISH IT HADN'T.
WE'VE LOST HUNDREDS. THEY SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN PUT AT RISK.
HERE'S WHAT I THINK. I WAS RIGHT...BUT WORLDMIND WAS RIGHT TOO.
THERE OUGHT TO BE A CORPS. BUT I WANT TO BUILD IT SLOWLY AND CAREFULLY.
YOU GUYS HAVE ALL BEEN EXCEPTIONAL. IF YOU WANT TO CALL IT QUITS NOW, I'M HAPPY WITH THAT.
BUT IF YOU WANT TO STAY AND BECOME THE FIRST GENERATION OF PROBATIONERS, I'D BE HONORED TO HAVE YOU.
WE'LL TRAIN TOGETHER, AND WORK TOGETHER. THEN, WHEN YOU'RE READY, WE'LL RECRUIT THE NEXT GENERATION TOGETHER.
SO... WHAT DO YOU THINK?
ARE YOU KIDDING?
YOU HAVE TO ASK?
AH...
...AND SO IT BEGINS.

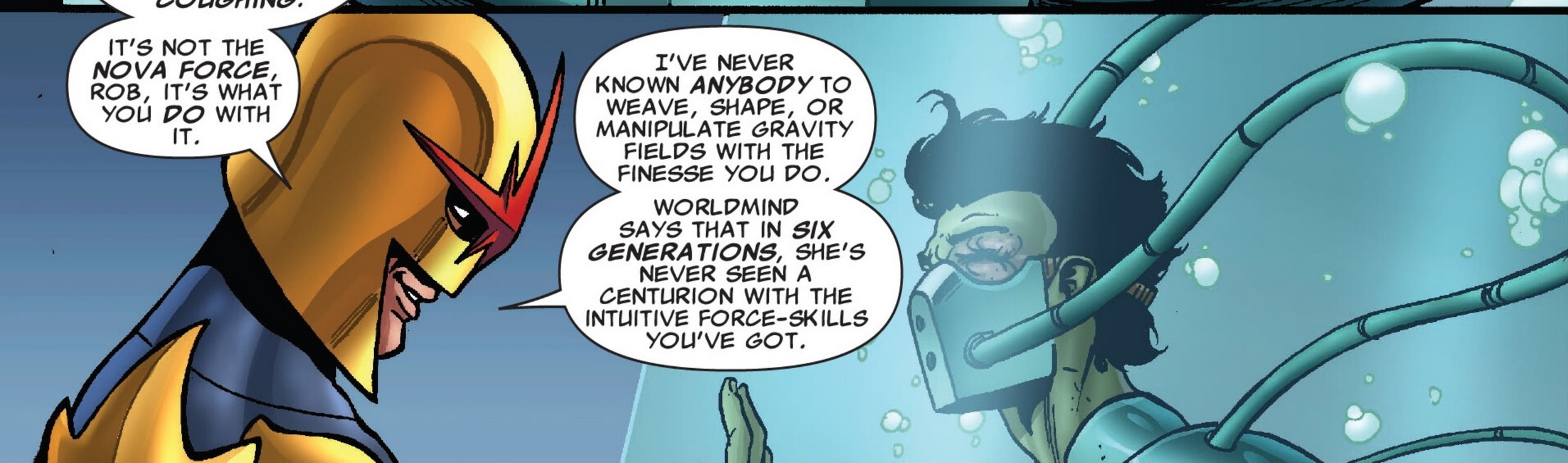

LATER...
THEY'RE GOOD PEOPLE, RICH. A GREAT FOUNDATION. A PROPER NUCLEUS FOR THE NEW CORPS.
WILL YOU STAY WITH US, WENDELL? I COULD USE ANOTHER TUTOR TO HELP OUT.
YOU COULD BE, LIKE, 'DEFENSE AGAINST THE QUARK ARTS.'
THANKS, BUT I'LL PASS... DUMBLEDORE.
I'VE GOT TO GO FIGURE OUT MYSELF. THIS NEW LIGHT-FORM INCARNATION OF MINE IS ODD. I NEED TO FIND OUT WHAT I AM NOW.
YOU'RE THE PROTECTOR OF THE UNIVERSE, WENDELL. WE MAY HAVE HAD SUBSTITUTES, BUT YOU'RE THE REAL DEAL.
THANKS, RICH, BUT UNTIL I'M COMFORTABLY BACK IN THAT SADDLE, IT WILL BE GOOD TO KNOW THAT THE NOVA CORPS HAS MY BACK.
YOU NEED US, YOU CALL. ANYTIME.
GOOD TO KNOW YOU, NOVA.
GOOD TO KNOW YOU TOO, QUASAR.
SO, TODAY'S AGENDA, RIDER.
I THINK WE SHOULD REPOSITION NU-XANDAR AND TAKE A LOOK AT THE UNHOLY MESS THE KREE HAVE LEFT.
THE DAMAGE THEY... THEY'RE CALLING IT THE FAULT, RIDER.
AGREED. PREPARE TO STARGATE NU-XANDAR.
SPEAKING OF NU-XANDAR, MY SYSTEMS ARE DETECTING SIGNS THAT EGO IS SELF-REPAIRING FASTER THAN WE ANTICIPATED.
THERE'S NO CAUSE FOR ALARM YET, BUT I THINK WE SHOULD BE STARTING TO LOOK FOR A NEW NU-XANDAR.
I'M FINE WITH THAT. I'VE NEVER BEEN THAT SOLD ON LIVING INSIDE A GIANT HEAD.
I DON'T KNOW HOW THE GUARDIANS STAND IT.
NOW HUSH. I'VE GOT TO GO SEE SOMEONE...

NU-XANDAR, PRIMARY MEDICAL BAY.
HEY, ROBSTER.


RICH.
HOW'RE YOU DOING?
I'M HEALING, SO WORLDMIND TELLS ME.
THIS REPAIR GEL STUFF IS FREAKY. IT TICKLES.
HEY, YOU REMEMBER WHEN LUKE GOT SMACKED BY THE WAMPA IN--
I REMEMBER, ROBBIE. BUT THIS IS REAL.
YOU DID GOOD, ROBBIE. YOU HELPED BRING IN AN ALPHA LEVEL KILLER.
NAAH. SHE BUSTED ME UP GOOD. YOU HAD TO FLY IN AND SAVE MY BACON.


YOU KEPT HER PINNED.
YEAH, BUT--
YOU ONLY HAD STANDARD CENTURION LEVEL NOVA FORCE AT YOUR DISPOSAL. YOU HELD A STRONTIAN PINNED FOR NEARLY TWO HOURS.
BUT YOU SEE--


I'M NOVA PRIME, BUSTER. I PACK SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER LEVELS OF NOVA FORCE.
AND I'M TELLING YOU, I COULDN'T HAVE DONE THAT.
OH COME ON.
SERIOUSLY. I COULDN'T HAVE PINNED HER LIKE THAT, AND I CAN EXPLODE SUPER-STAR DESTROYERS BY COUGHING.


IT'S NOT THE NOVA FORCE, ROB, IT'S WHAT YOU DO WITH IT.
I'VE NEVER KNOWN ANYBODY TO WEAVE, SHAPE, OR MANIPULATE GRAVITY FIELDS WITH THE FINESSE YOU DO.
WORLDMIND SAYS THAT IN SIX GENERATIONS, SHE'S NEVER SEEN A CENTURION WITH THE INTUITIVE FORCE-SKILLS YOU'VE GOT.

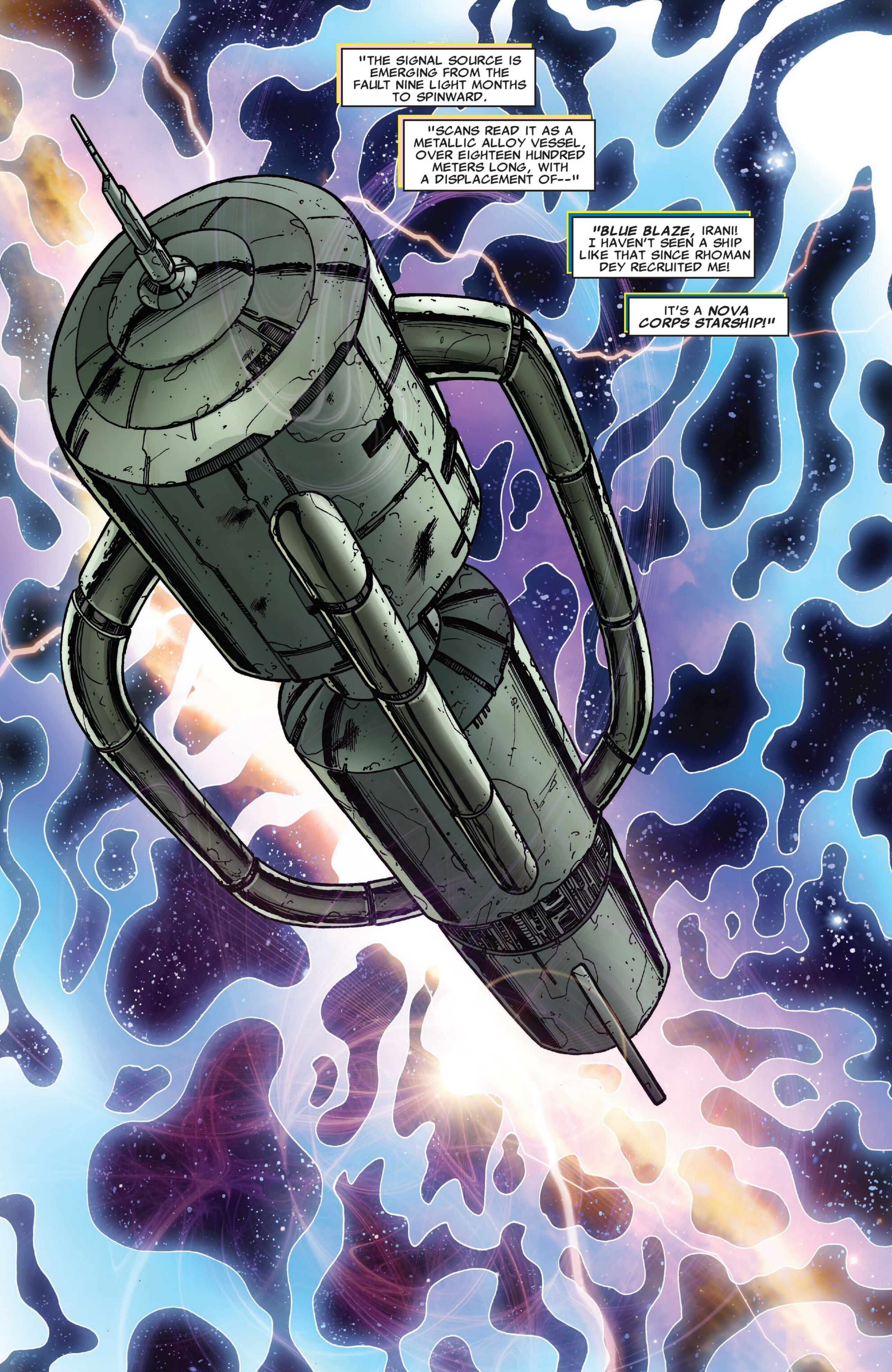
YOU'RE TELLING ME THIS TO SOFTEN THE BLOW THAT YOU'RE SENDING ME HOME, RIGHT?
DUH! MOM AND DAD WOULD KILL ME IF I LET YOU FOLLOW ME INTO THE CAPES AND TIGHTS BUSINESS! CAN YOU IMAGINE?!
I NEVER WANTED YOU TO BECOME A SUPER HERO, ROBBIE, BECAUSE I WAS AFRAID YOU'D GET YOURSELF HURT.
WELL, LOOK WHAT HAPPENED.
BUT, HOLY COW, YOU PROVED YOURSELF TOO.
SO HERE'S THE THING...
...YOU'RE THE GENIUS, ROB.
FLLKK
HOW THE BLUE BLAZES DO WE TELL MOM AND DAD YOU'RE JOINING THE CORPS?

THE KREE-SHI'AR FRONTIER.
STARGATE TRANSFER COMPLETE. NU-XANDAR IS NOW SIXTEEN LIGHT-YEARS FROM THE KREE FRONTIER.

INERTIAL DAMPERS STABILIZING.
NU-XANDAR HOLDING STATION.
SHOW US THIS "FAULT," THEN, WORLDMIND.
ON SCREEN.

BY THE ETERNAL SEEDS OF RIGEL!
DATA-GODS!
WOW, THAT'S NOT RIGHT!
NO!
THAT'S THE FAULT, WORLDMIND?
IT LOOKS LIKE A GREAT BIG HOLE THROUGH SPACE!
PROBATIONER LINDY NOLAN IS REMARKABLY ACCURATE IN HER ASSESSMENT, RIDER...

THE FAULT IS A HOLE THAT'S BEEN PUNCHED THROUGH SPACE AND TIME, PEOPLE. IT'S LIKE A SUCKING CHEST WOUND IN THE FABRIC OF REALITY.
AND IT'S SEVERAL PARSECS ACROSS.
FOR THE RECORD, I BELIEVE THE KREE TO BE BLAMELESS. IT WAS THOSE FREAKY-DEAKY INHUMANS WHO LED THEM ASTRAY...
YEAH, THANKS FOR THE IMPARTIAL REVIEW, KO-REL OF HALA.
PRIME, I HAVE A CONTACT.
I AM PICKING UP A... A XANDARIAN DISTRESS SIGNAL.
WHAT? SHOW ME!


"THE SIGNAL SOURCE IS EMERGING FROM THE FAULT NINE LIGHT MONTHS TO SPINWARD.
"SCANS READ IT AS A METALLIC ALLOY VESSEL, OVER EIGHTEEN HUNDRED METERS LONG, WITH A DISPLACEMENT OF--"
"BLUE BLAZE, IRAN! I HAVEN'T SEEN A SHIP LIKE THAT SINCE RHOMAN DEY RECRUITED ME!
IT'S A NOVA CORPS STARSHIP!"

Nova #28 70th Anniversary frame variant by MIKE PERKINS

The Guardians of the Galaxy fractured after learning that Star-Lord used Mantis' telepathy to coax its members into joining the team. However, with portents warning of an approaching cosmic calamity, Star-Lord rebuilt the team with new members including Bug and Jack Flag. Phyla-Vell journeyed to the land of the dead with Drax, and returned with her dead lover Moondragon —— and the ominous new name Martyr.

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY 13

DEBRIEF LOG: JACK FLAG (JACK HARRISON, VIGILANTE, ENHANCED STRENGTH AND CONSTITUTION)
I DON'T KNOW *HOW* IT STARTED.
WE WERE DOWN AT STARLIN'S, MINDING OUR OWN BUSINESS.
IT'S THE BEST PLACE TO GET A DRINK ON *KNOWHERE*, THE GIANT SEVERED-ROBOT-HEAD-SLASH-RESEARCH-STATION-AT THE-END-OF-SPACE THAT THE GUARDIANS THINK IS A *NORMAL* VENUE FOR AN HQ.
ANYWAY...
"...THE DANCING GIRLS WERE GYRATING...
"...THE BAND WAS PLAYING...
"...AND *THAT'S* WHEN THE BAR FIGHT STARTED.

"DID I MENTION I'M ALLERGIC TO COSMIC STUFF?"
PEACEMAKERS

DEBRIEF LOG: STAR-LORD (PETER JASON QUILL, HALF TERRAN/HALF SPARTOI, NO ENHANCED ABILITIES)
WE WERE CELEBRATING THE RETURN OF PHYLA AND DRAX.
THEY'D BEEN OFF ON THEIR TRAVELS, AND SOMEHOW THEY'D MANAGED TO BRING MOONDRAGON BACK FROM THE DEAD.
YOU KNOW, I'M GOING TO NEED TO ASK THEM SOME SERIOUS QUESTIONS ABOUT THAT.
THIS ISN'T TURNING OUT TO BE A QUIET EVENING AT ALL, PHYLA.
YEAH, WELL... THE SHI'AR STARTED IT, SWEETIE.
DEBRIEF LOG: ROCKET RACCOON (EVOLVED MAMMAL, TACTICAL AND DEMOLITIONS EXPERTISE)
...THEN THE SHI'AR DUDE, HE SAYS SOMETHING ABOUT CAPTAIN MARVEL, SO PHYLA PUTS HIM THROUGH A WALL.
THAT'S WHEN IT REALLY KICKED OFF.
SMAK
I AM STILL BOTHERED BY PHYLA'S CHANGE IN APPEARANCE AND NAME.
WHAT KIND OF TITLE IS "MARTYR"? BESIDES BEING UNNECESSARILY OMINOUS, I MEAN.
WHAT YA SAY, MANTIS? I CAN'T--÷TIK!÷--HEAR YOU OVER ALL THE BREAKING GLASS AND GUTTURAL "OOFF!" NOISES!
DEBRIEF LOG: MANTIS (CELESTIAL MADONNA, EMPATH, TELEPATH, PYROKINETIC)
PHYLA HAS CHANGED. SHE IS NO LONGER QUASAR. SHE NO LONGER POSSESSES THE QUANTUM BANDS. SHE HAS TAKEN THE NAME MARTYR.
THIS TROUBLES ME.
IT PARTICULARLY TROUBLES ME BECAUSE I CANNOT READ HER FUTURE. NOT AT ALL.
OF COURSE A BAR FIGHT MIGHT NOT BE THE BEST TIME TO DISCUSS SUCH CONCERNS.

DEBRIEF LOG: BUG (KALIKLAK ENTOMOLOGICAL BIOFORM, WARRIOR-ACROBAT)
MOONDRAGON, THOUGH. HOT, AM I--TIK!---RIGHT? EH? EH? AM I RIGHT?
HUH?
WHAT DO YOU--TIK!--- MEAN "SHE GETS ON THE OTHER BUS"?
EXPLAIN TO ME PRECISELY HOW INDULGING IN A BARROOM BRAWL LIKE COMMON THUGS SQUARES WITH THE DIGNITY OF OUR ROLE AS GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY?
DIGNITY?! POOH! WHERE'S THE FUN IN DIGNITY?
BANZAI!
DEBRIEF LOG: MAJOR VICTORY (VANCE ASTRO, TIME-DISPLACED HUMAN, COMBAT GENIUS)
THEY WERE CALLED SHI'AR. A FIERCE WARRIOR RACE, APPARENTLY.
ONE OF THEIR WARBIRDS HAD BEEN SENT TO RESUPPLY THEIR DELEGATION ON KNOWHERE, AND THE SHIP'S CREW WERE ENJOYING A LITTLE SHORE LEAVE.
I DON'T KNOW THE SHI'AR. WHERE I COME FROM, THEIR SPECIES HAS BEEN EXTINCT FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS.
SO HOW'S IT HANGING, GROOT?
I AM GROOT!
SAME OLD, HUH?
I AM GROOT.
DEBRIEF LOG: GROOT (HIS DIVINE MAJESTY KING GROOT THE 23RD, MONARCH OF PLANET X, CUSTODIAN OF THE BRANCH WORLDS, RULER OF ALL HE SHADES, FLORA COLOSSUS)

IT'S REALLY GOING OFF TONIGHT, HUH?
ACTUALLY, THIS IS FAIRLY NORMAL FOR STARLIN'S ON A WEEKEND.
I CAN'T COUNT THE TIMES I'VE SEEN THE PLACE LIKE THIS.
WOW. IT'S EXCITING BEING YOU.
CAN SOMEONE EXPLAIN WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?!
KZZAROW
WHAT THE--?
YEOOWWW!
HEYA, ADAM.
HOW'S TRICKS?

GUARDIANS' CONTROL CENTER, TEN MINUTES AND A FEW GLASSES OF SOBER-PAST™ LATER.

THE KREE AND THE SHI'AR HAVE GONE TO WAR.

THE SHI'AR HAVE *ALREADY* USED NEGA-BOMBS AGAINST KREE TARGETS AT RADIUS EIGHTEEN, DISRADI AND TAU SCEPTRE.

THE FRAGILE FABRIC OF SPACE/TIME WILL *NOT* WITHSTAND SUCH PERNICIOUS ABUSE.

THE WAR MUST BE STOPPED AS *QUICKLY* AND *CLEANLY* AS POSSIBLE.

SO... IS THIS YOU REJOINING THE TEAM?

NOT IN ANY FORMAL SENSE. I'M CERTAINLY NOT GOING TO TAKE ORDERS FROM *YOU*.

BUT RIGHT NOW, WE SHOULD WORK *TOGETHER* FOR THIS COMMON PURPOSE.

AND *THEN*?

I HAVE *OTHER* MATTERS TO ATTEND TO. I HAVE SUSPENDED MY INVESTIGATION OF THE *UNIVERSAL CHURCH OF TRUTH* UNTIL HOSTILITIES HAVE BEEN CONTAINED.

LISTEN, I *NEVER* MEANT TO BETRAY YOUR TRUST, WARLOCK. I GOT MANTIS TO *ENCOURAGE* PEOPLE TO JOIN THE TEAM TELEPATHICALLY BECAUSE I--

WHATEVER SHORTCUTS YOU TOOK TO FOUND THIS GROUP ARE *IMMATERIAL*, PETER.

THE FACT THAT I RETURNED TO FIND YOU ALL... RIOTING IN A *LOW-LIFE SALOON*... HARDLY INSPIRES FAITH IN YOUR CHARACTER.

OKAY, OKAY. BUT CAN WE AT LEAST PUT ON A SHOW OF *UNITY* FOR THE TEAM?

UNTIL THE KREE/SHI'AR BLOODSHED IS STOPPED? AGREED.

HEY, EVERYONE, ADAM'S GOT SOME NEWS--

DEBRIEF LOG: ADAM WARLOCK (COSMIC BEING, ENHANCED BIOLOGY, METAPHYSICAL ENERGY MANIPULATION)

THE ANNIHILATION WAVE THAT CARRIED THE INVADING NEGATIVE ZONE HORDES INTO OUR GALAXY A YEAR AGO DAMAGED SPACE TO A *TERRIBLE* EXTENT.

ADDITIONAL TRAUMA COULD CAUSE IT TO TEAR OR EVEN *COLLAPSE*.

AND AS IF THE TOTAL MATERIAL DISINTEGRATION OF OUR GALAXY WASN'T BAD *ENOUGH*, THERE ARE *THINGS* WAITING OUTSIDE OUR REALITY.

THINGS THAT WE *CANNOT* ALLOW TO GET IN.

--REPEAT, I DID NOT *MEAN* TO DAMAGE YOU, BUG. I DID NOT *KNOW* YOU WERE PART OF THE TEAM.

YEAH, WELL, YOU--*TIK!*--DIDN'T BOTHER TO *ASK*.

AND *ON* THAT--*TIK!*--SUBJECT, WHY DIDN'T I MAKE THE *FIRST CUT*?

--IN SHORT, WE *HAVE* TO INTERVENE. THE WAR MUST BE STOPPED BEFORE IT CAN DO *IRREPARABLE* HARM.

UH-*HUH*. GOOD LUCK WITH *THAT*.

PHYLA?

ON *ONE* SIDE, THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM. THE MOST *MASSIVE* MILITARY FORCE IN EXISTENCE, AND THAT'S *BEFORE* YOU EVEN FACTOR IN EMPEROR VULCAN AND THE IMPERIAL GUARD.

OR THE DETAIL THAT VULCAN'S SO FAR OFF HIS CHUFF HE MAKES GALACTUS' APPROVAL RATINGS LOOK LIKE THE *DALAI LAMA'S*.

RIGHT. AND ON THE OTHER SIDE, THE KREE.
YOUR PEOPLE, PHYLA.
EXACTLY. MY PEOPLE. A WARRIOR RACE. AND YOU'RE TELLING US THE KREE ARE NOW BEING LED BY BLACK BOLT AND THE INHUMANS?
THAT'S WHAT INTELLIGENCE IS SUGGESTING.
THE INHUMANS ARE ELITE WARRIORS. THEY POSSESS A DAZZLING ARRAY OF POST- MORTAL TALENTS.
I THINK WHAT THE -- ÷TIK!÷--"GROUP" IS TRYING TO SAY, WARLOCK, IS THAT THERE'S...WHAT? A DOZEN OF US?
I DON'T SHRINK FROM A SCRAP, BUT SERIOUSLY...
QUITE. SO WHAT ARE YOU PROPOSING WE DO?
SIT BLACK BOLT AND VULCAN DOWN AND--÷TIK!÷--TALK THEM OUT OF IT?
EXACTLY.
THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO.

TACTICS.

TWO TEAMS.

AGREED.

ONE GOES TO BLACK BOLT, ONE GOES TO VULCAN.

YOU'VE GOT MUCHO HISTORY WITH THE KREE, PETE. YOU TAKE HALA.

I'LL TACKLE THE SHI'AR END.

YOU SURE, ROCKY? THAT'S GONNA BE THE TOUGH SELL.

YEAH, WELL THAT'S WHY I CALL WARLOCK ON MY TEAM. AND GROOT AND MAJOR VICTORY AND DRAX.

THAT'S SOME HEAVY ARTILLERY.

YOU SAID IT YOURSELF, THE INHUMANS ARE REASONABLE, CIVILIZED PEOPLE. YOU WON'T NEED THE BIG HITTERS.

FAIR ENOUGH.

BLACK BOLT WILL LISTEN TO YOU.

WELL, IT'S NOT LIKE HE'S GOING TO INTERRUPT ME.

A LITTLE SMOOTH, STRAIGHT-TALKING AND YOUR JOB'S AS GOOD AS DONE.

AND IF I HAVE TO GET WARLOCK AND DRAX TO GIVE VULCAN NOOGIES UNTIL HE FOLDS, SO BE IT.

DON'T FORGET YOU'VE GOT TO CONTAIN THE NEGA-BOMB DAMAGE AT DISRADI BEFORE YOU CONFRONT VULCAN.

CONSIDER IT DONE.

OKAY. OKAY, GOOD. WE CAN DO THIS. WE'RE THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY.

YES, WE ARE.

THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT WE WERE FORMED TO STOP.

YES, IT IS.

WE CAN DO THIS, RIGHT?

DON'T SPOIL THE MOMENT.

KREE TEAM, PREPPED TO BEAM OUT.
SHI'AR TEAM, READY TO ROCKET.
HELLO? CONTROL? I SAID WE'RE READY.

HEE HEE HEE!
HO HO HO HO!
OH HAH HAH!

THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU LEAVE THREE TELEPATHS MINDING THE STORE.
SORRY, COMRADE! SORRY!

I JUST TEEP FUNNY JOKE AND BOTH LADIES WERE HIGHLY AMUSED.
COSMO APOLOGIZE FOR UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT.
NOW STAND BY FOR CONTINUUM CORTEX TRANSFER...

...AND DO TRY NOT TO COME BACK DEAD.

I AM NOT ENJOYING THIS ALREADY!
FISSURE COLLAPSE ZONE, DISRADI SYSTEM, KREE FRONTIER.
JUST GIVE ME FIVE MORE MINUTES!
I DON'T THINK THIS PLANET'S GOT FIVE MORE MINUTES LEFT!
DISRADI WAS ONE OF THE KREE COLONY WORLDS HIT BY SHI'AR NEGA-BOMBS DURING THE FIRST STRIKES.
NOT ONLY HAD THE BOMBING MURDERED THE PLANET, IT HAD BLOWN A HOLE IN SPACE, JUST LIKE THE WARLOCK GUY HAD WARNED IT MIGHT.
THE CINDERED REMAINS OF DISRADI ARE FALLING INTO THE FISSURE!
THIS WOULD BE THE CINDERED REMAINS OF DISRADI THAT WE'RE STANDING ON?
PLEASE, MAJOR, I AM TRYING TO COMPOSE A SPELL THAT WILL TRANSMUTE THE BULK OF THIS MOLTEN PLANETOID INTO AN ULTRA-TRANSITION METAL.
A LARGE ENOUGH NUGGET OF SUCH METAL SHOULD SEAL THE FISSURE.
LIKE A WOODEN STAKE THROUGH A VAMPIRE? A SILVER BULLET THROUGH A WEREWOLF?
WELL, SORT OF. DO YOU BELIEVE IN SUCH THINGS, MAJOR?

I'M A TIME-TRAVELER STANDING ON A BURNING PLANET THAT'S FALLING INTO A HOLE IN SPACE WHILE TALKING TO A SORCERER.

AT THIS POINT I BELIEVE IN *EVERYTHING*.

MANTIS? CAN YOU HEAR ME?

WE'VE GOT A FIX ON THE BIG SHI'AR FLEET HOLDING STATION AT THE EDGE OF THE DISRADI SYSTEM.

I THINK THEY'VE STAYED TO WATCH THE PLANET *COOK*.

THE SCAN SAYS VULCAN'S STAR DESTROYER IS WITH THEM. AS SOON AS WE'RE DONE HERE, TRANSPORT US OFF THIS ROCK AND ONTO THAT SHIP.

UNDERSTOOD, ROCKET.

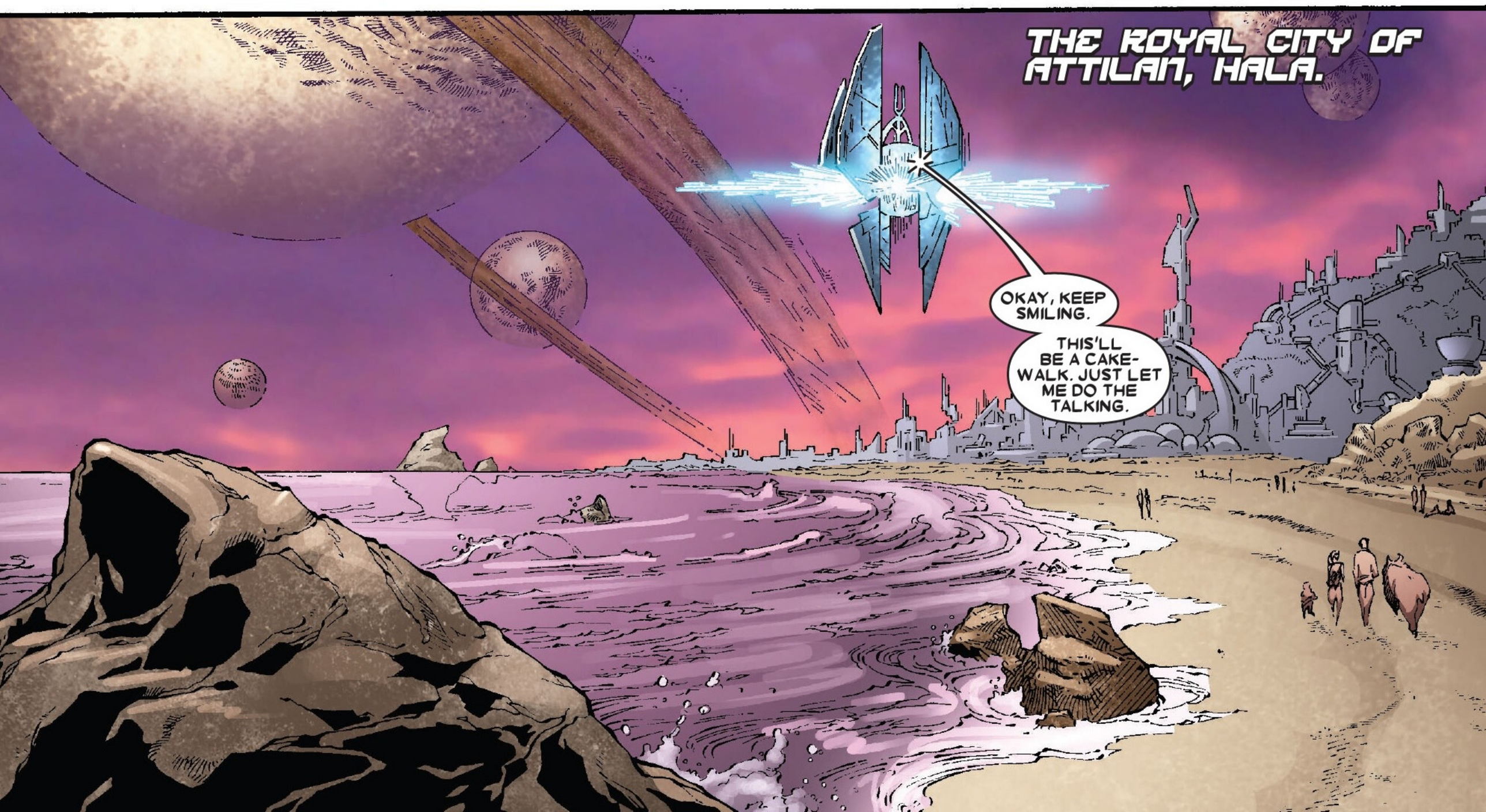
UHM... WHAT HAPPENS IF THE FLAGSHIP IS *TELEPORT-SHIELDED?*

WE CAN'T BE *THAT* UNLUCKY... RIGHT?

GROOT'S BEGINNING TO *SMOLDER*. WE GOTTA SPLIT.

CAN'T HAVE MY WOODEN BUDDY TURNED INTO A *BONFIRE*.

WARLOCK! WE HAVE TO BOOK... *NOW!*



SHHHH! GAME FACES!

AND REMEMBER, THIS IS A CAKE-WALK.

HIS ROYAL MAJESTY BLACK BOLT!

YOUR MAJESTY.

I AM *STAR-LORD*, OF THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY.

THANK YOU FOR GRANTING US THIS AUDIENCE.

MAJESTY, WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, YOUR WAR AGAINST THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM MUST *STOP*.

THE COSMOS *CANNOT* SUFFER ANOTHER CATASTROPHE LIKE THE ANNIHILATION WAVE.

I DON'T JUST MEAN *GALACTIC CULTURE*, I MEAN THE *FABRIC* OF THE CONTINUUM *ITSELF*.

WE KNOW THE SHI'AR ARE THE *AGGRESSORS* IN THIS. WE KNOW THEY ARE *UNLIKELY* TO LISTEN TO REASON.

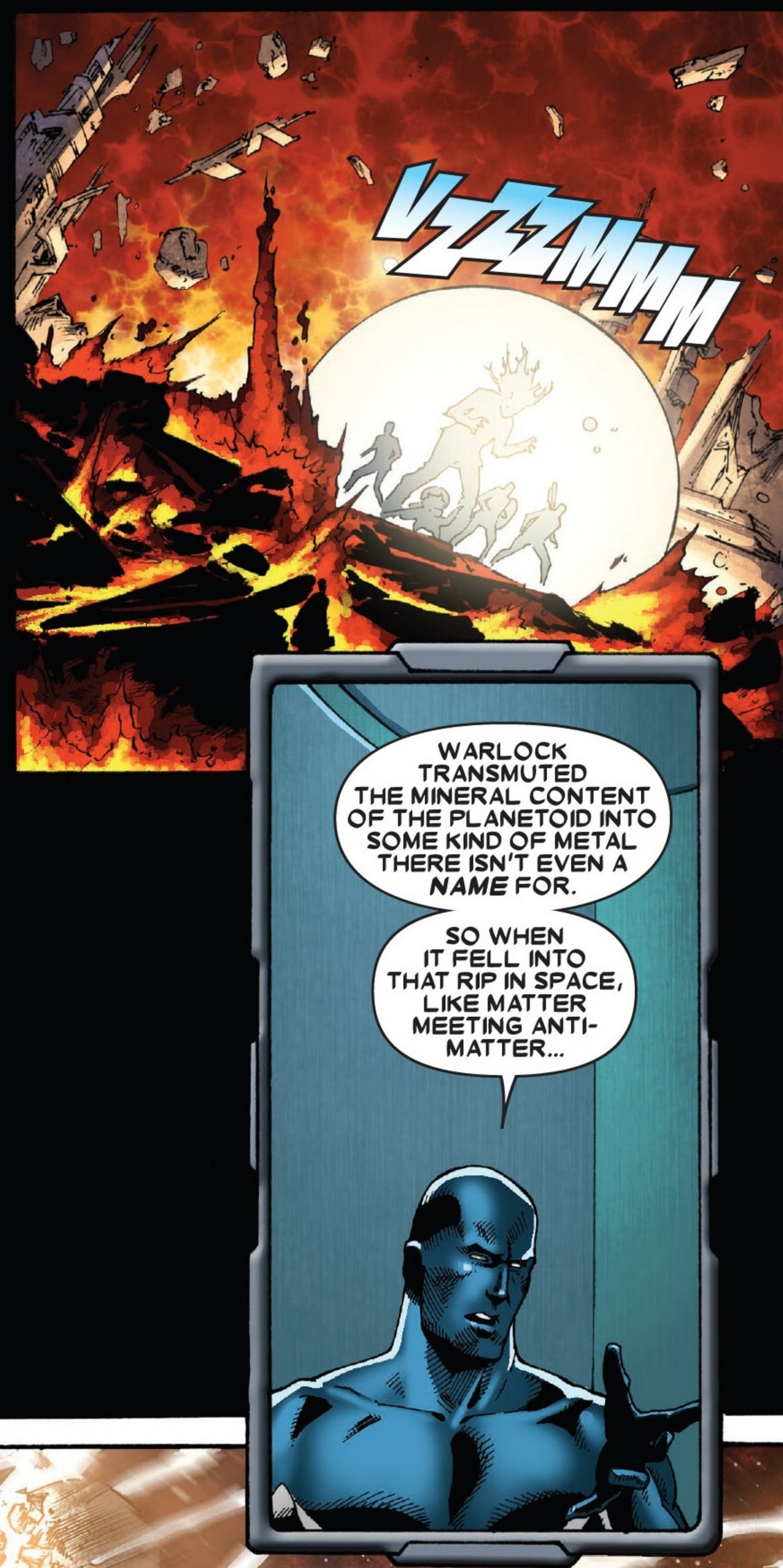
BUT WE BELIEVE THAT *YOU* HAVE THE WISDOM AND INSIGHT TO UNDERSTAND THE *GRAVITY* OF THIS SITUATION.

I *IMPLORE* YOU. PLEASE STOP THIS WAR.

NO.

UH...WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

FISSURE COLLAPSE ZONE, DISKADI SYSTEM.
SERIOUSLY RUNNING OUT OF TIME HERE!
DONE! THE SPELL IS DONE!
MANTIS! PUNCH IT! TELEPORT NOW!


VZZZMMMM
WARLOCK TRANSMUTED THE MINERAL CONTENT OF THE PLANETOID INTO SOME KIND OF METAL THERE ISN'T EVEN A NAME FOR.
SO WHEN IT FELL INTO THAT RIP IN SPACE, LIKE MATTER MEETING ANTI-MATTER...

SUZZTCH

VICINITY OF THE THIRD SHI'AR BATTLEGROUP, EDGE OF THE DISKADI SYSTEM.

VZZMMM

UGHHH!

OWW!

GUHH!

WHAT HAPPENED?

TELEPORT-SHIELDED! THE SCUTTING SHI'AR ARE *TELEPORT-SHIELDED!*

OF *ALL* THE--

HEY...

...WHERE'S *BLONDIE?*

IT TURNS OUT THAT EMPEROR VULCAN'S FEAR OF THE INHUMAN TELEPORT CADRES HAD RESULTED IN HIS FLAGSHIP BEING FULLY SCREENED AGAINST *TELEPENETRATIVE ASSAULT.*

HOWEVER, THE SCREENING WAS NOT PROOFED AGAINST ESOTERIC PROPERTIES.

MAGIC, IF YOU LIKE.

VULCAN'S FLAGSHIP.

UHN!

VZZZMMM

WHAT THE--

ROCKET?

WHERE *IS* EVERYONE?

I DON'T KNOW WHERE EVERYONE *ELSE* IS...

...BUT I'M RIGHT HERE.

EDGE OF THE DISKADI SYSTEM.
WE'RE SITTING DUCKS OUT HERE.
YEAH! I KNOW! THE FULL MIND-FRAZZLING SCALE OF THE JEOPARDY WE'RE IN HAS NOT ESCAPED ME!
MANTIS! MANTIS! ANSWER ME!
COMMS ARE DOWN! THE PASSPORTS ARE FRIED!
ATTENTION, INTERLOPERS. THIS IS THE IMPERIAL SHI'AR SUPER-DESTROYER DOMINATION THROUGH SUPERIOR FIREPOWER.
PREPARE TO BE BROUGHT ABOARD BY TELEPORT SCOOP. DO NOT RESIST.
THIS I DO NOT BELIEVE.
FZAP
CH'OD!
ROCKET RACCOON!
YOU KNOW EACH OTHER?
THESE GUYS AIN'T SHI'AR.

WE'RE THE STARJAMMERS.
WE'VE BEEN SHADOWING THE SHI'AR FLEET IN THIS CAPTURED IONCLAD FOR THE LAST TEN HOURS.
MIND TELLING US WHO YOU ARE?
I AM GR--
WE'RE THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY.

DOESN'T RING A BELL.
COME ON, HAVOK. THIS IS ROCKET RACCOON. HRM. I COULDN'T JUST LEAVE HIM AND HIS PALS FLOATING OUT THERE.
YOUR DAD AND ME, WE USED TO FREEBOOT WITH HIM, BACK IN THE DAY!
OF COURSE, THE BOOTS WERE FREER THEN.

YOUR PA IS CHRIS SUMMERS? HOW IS THE GREAT CORSAIR THESE DAYS?
HE'S DEAD.

BRIDGE OF THE SHI'AR SUPERDESTROYER "LAMENTATIONS OF THE ENEMY'S WIDOW."

COMMANDER KACHIL! SUPER-DESTROYER DOMINATION IS NOT ACKNOWLEDGING HAILS.

INTELFEED SHOWS IT IS MOVING OUT OF AUTHORIZED FORMATION.

BRING US ABOUT, STEERSMAN!

WEAPONEERS TO LIVE CONDITION!

WEAPONEERS TO LIVE, AYE!

RADIOMAN, CONTACT THE DOMINATION AND INFORM THEM THEY HAVE TWENTY SECONDS TO ACCOUNT FOR THEIR BEHAVIOR.

YES, COMMANDER.

COMMANDER, I'M READING WHAT SEEMS TO BE AN ANTI-MAT CASCADE IN THE DOMINATION'S DRIVE CORE...

SHARRA AND K'YTHRI! IT--

I LIKE PLAN B...

...IT MADE A FLASH SO *BRIGHT*, I SAW THE BONES IN MY PAWS.

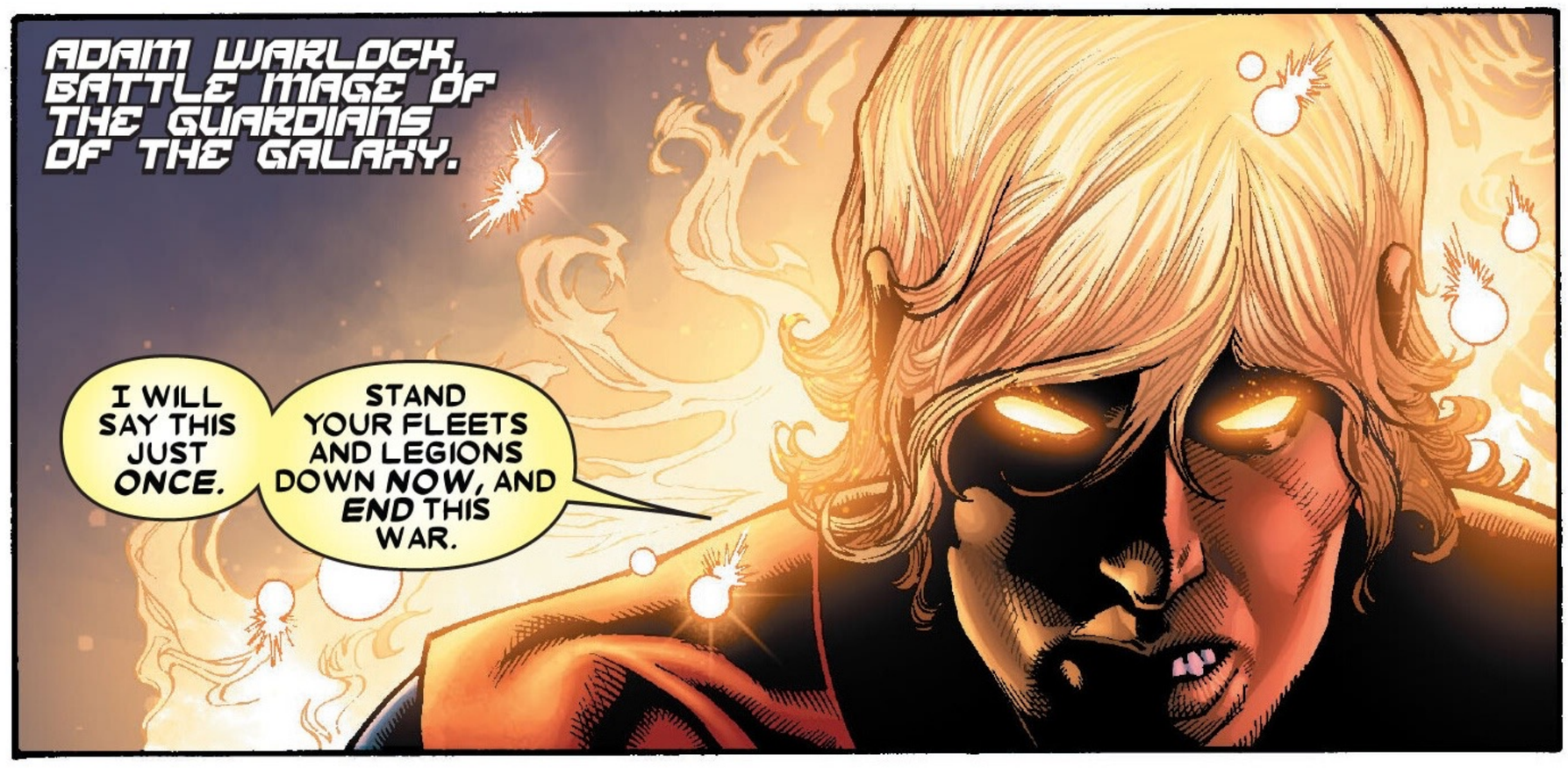
WELL, IT SHOULD KEEP THEM *REELING* LONG ENOUGH FOR US TO MAKE THE JUMP TO 4-SPACE, ANYWAY.

AND *THEN* WHAT? WHAT ARE THE STARJAMMERS *DOING* HERE? WHAT'S THE *PLAN?*

WE'RE GOING TO RESCUE MAJESTRIX LILANDRA, RESTORE HER TO THE THRONE OF THE SHI'AR EMPIRE, AND *TOPPLE* THE TYRANT VULCAN.

YOU IN?

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY 14



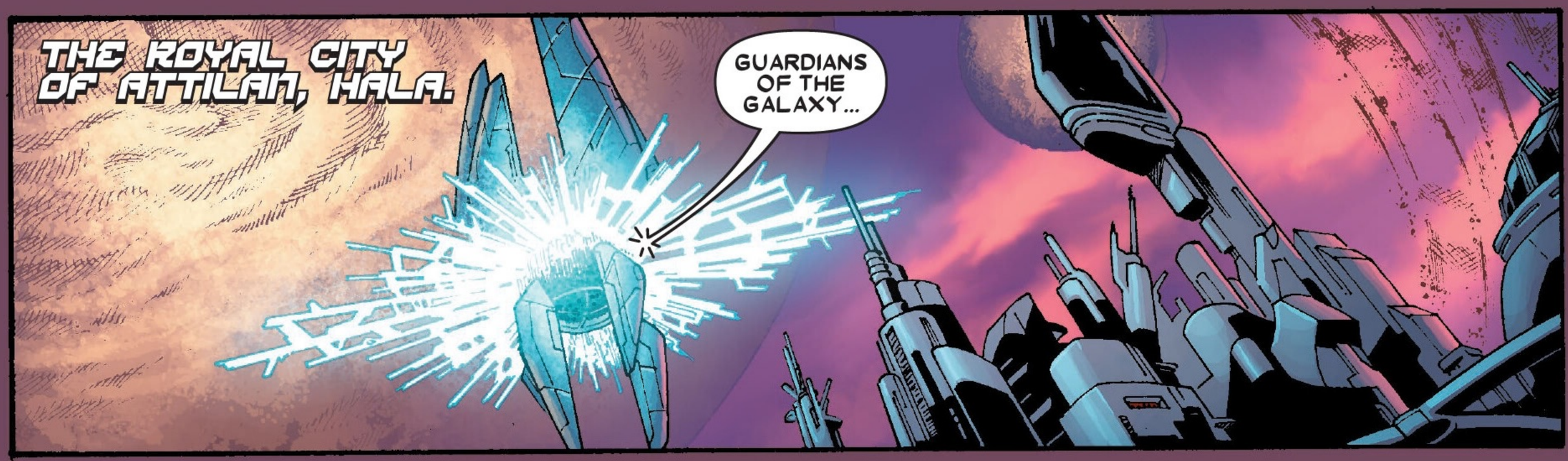
KRAKOOM

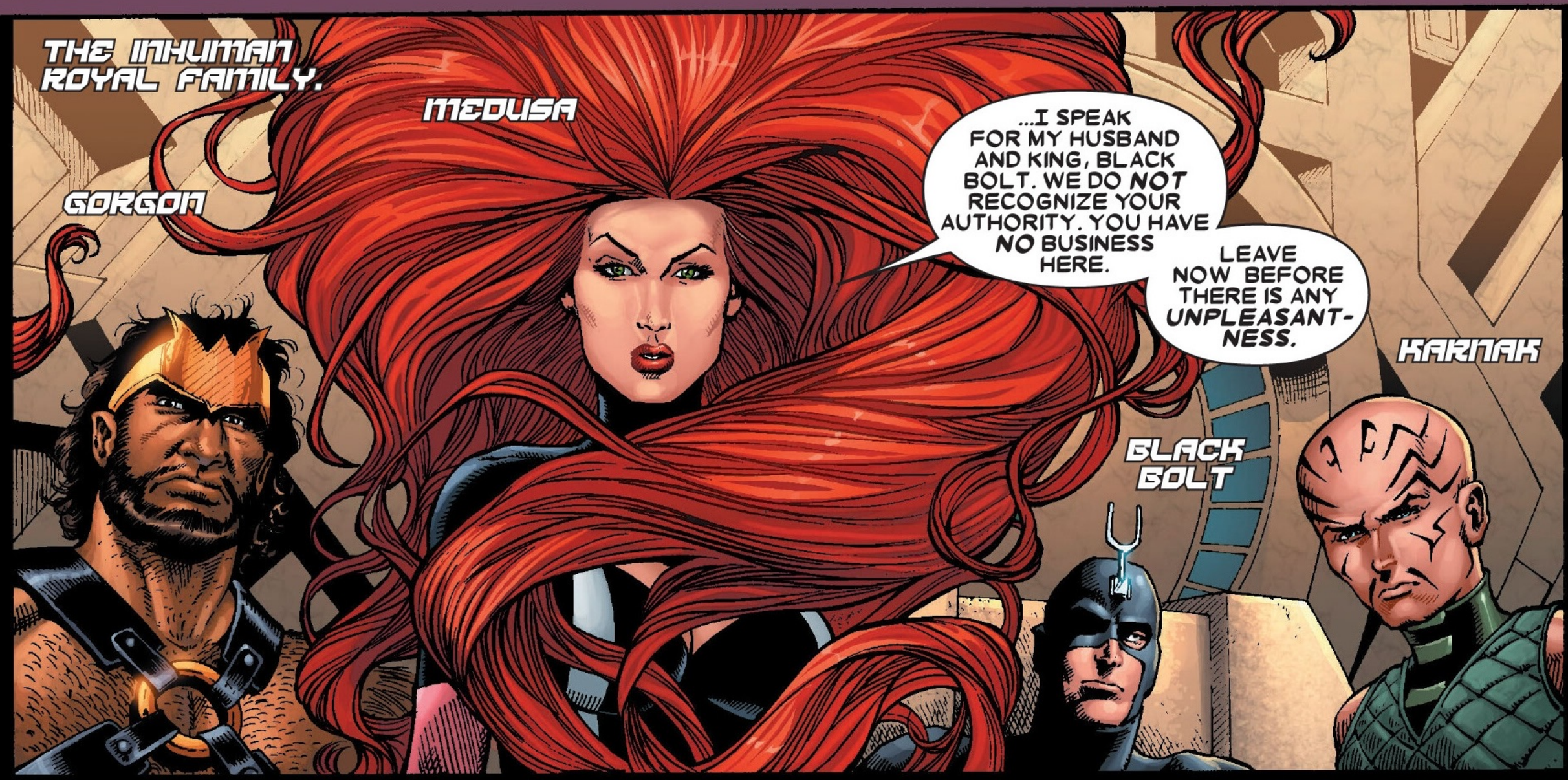
HAMMER II, FLAGSHIP OF EMPEROR VULCAN, EDGE OF THE DISKADI SYSTEM.

To The Death

ALARM! ALARM! HULL BREACH! IMPERIAL QUARTERS COMPROMISED!
THE EMPEROR IS IN JEOPARDY. DEPLOY FULL IMPERIAL GUARD STRENGTHS IMMEDIATELY.
ORACLE! IDENTIFY THE THREAT!
THE MIND SIGNATURE IS ECCENTRIC, MENTOR.
I AM READING SOME KIND OF ...MAGE.
SORCERY? BUT THAT'S... THERE IS NO LOGICAL... I MEAN...
OH, BY THE ELEVENTH ORDER! FIND ME GUARDSMAN MAGIQUE, NOW!
I WARNED YOU, TYRANT!
NO, YOU THREATENED ME. BIG DIFFERENCE. NO ONE THREATENS THE MAJESTOR.
AND WHAT'S THIS YOU'RE THROWING AT ME? IS THIS...
...MAGIC?

IT IS, ISN'T IT?
I CAN SMELL IT. I CAN TASTE IT.
AND WHEN ALL'S SAID AND DONE, IT MAY BE EXOTIC BUT IT'S JUST ANOTHER FORM OF ENERGY.
NHHHF!
GUESS WHAT I CAN DO?
AARGGH!
I'M A HIGH ORDER ENERGY MANIPULATOR, YOU WITLESS [illegible]!
UNHH!
SHI'AR MAJESTOR! LISTEN TO ME! YOUR WAR WITH THE KREE THREATENS THE VERY FABRIC OF SPACE-TIME!
IT COULD RIP CREATION APART AT THE SEAMS!
I'M TALKING ABOUT THE FATE OF THE UNIVERSE!
I AM THE UNIVERSE!


THE ROYAL CITY OF ATTILAN, HALA.
GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY...


THE INHUMAN ROYAL FAMILY.
MEDUSA
GORGON
...I SPEAK FOR MY HUSBAND AND KING, BLACK BOLT. WE DO NOT RECOGNIZE YOUR AUTHORITY. YOU HAVE NO BUSINESS HERE.
LEAVE NOW BEFORE THERE IS ANY UNPLEASANT-NESS.
KARNAK
BLACK BOLT

UNPLEASANT-NESS? SORRY MISS BAD HAIR DAY, BUT WE'RE ALREADY WAAAAAAY PAST THAT.
BUG
GAMORA
JACK FLAG
STAR-LORD
MARTYR
PHYLA! GEEZ, WILL YOU LEAVE THIS TO ME?

'CAUSE YOU'RE DOING SUCH A FINE JOB, PETER?
WHAT'S GOT INTO YOU? DIPLOMACY, I SAID!
YEAH, THAT ALWAYS WORKS.
I ÷TIK!÷ THINK WHAT WE'RE TRYING TO ÷TIK!÷ SAY HERE IS...

...WE LIVE IN THIS GALAXY *TOO*, YOU KNOW?

I MEAN, IF THIS ÷*TIK!*÷ WAR OF YOURS BLOWS EVERYTHING UP, WHAT *THEN?*

THIS IS OUR ÷*TIK!*÷ BUSINESS BECAUSE IT AFFECTS US! THAT FACT *ALONE* MANDATES US WITH *ALL* THE AUTHORITY WE NEED.

ON BEHALF OF THE CITIZENS OF THE GALAXY, YOU *MUST* ÷*TIK!*÷ LISTEN TO US!

AND, INCIDENTALLY, YOU'VE GOT THE MOST *BEAUTIFUL* ÷*TIK!*÷ EYES.

HOW DARE YOU SPEAK TO THE QUEEN LIKE THAT!

STAND BACK, GORGON. I AM *QUITE* CAPABLE OF HANDLING GROTESQUE OVERTURES FROM RIFFRAFF LIKE THIS.

THIS SORT OF THING IS *EXACTLY* WHY YOU DIDN'T MAKE THE CUT FOR THE TEAM, YOU KNOW?

WE ARE *NOT* UNSYMPATHETIC TO YOUR POSITION, STAR-LORD OF THE GUARDIANS.

BUT THE INHUMANS HAVE TAKEN DOMINION OVER THE KREE, TO VOUCHSAFE AN ANCIENT, *MUTUAL* DESTINY.

WE DO NOT HAVE THE *LUXURY* OF CONSIDERING THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS. WE ARE REQUIRED TO MAKE HARD CHOICES, DRIVEN BY *SELF-INTEREST.*

THESE MAY NOT *SUIT* THE "REST" OF THE GALAXY...

...BUT THE SHI'AR *THREATEN* US. THEY *INJURE* US.

ONLY A *FOOL* WOULD NOT EXPECT US TO DEFEND OURSELVES.

ARE YOU A *FOOL*, STAR-LORD OF THE GUARDIANS?

OKAY, SOMEONE'S REALLY NOT LISTENING!
WHOA WHOA WHOA!
WEAPON! WEAPON DRAWN!
A THREAT TO THE QUEEN'S PERSON! SEIZE THEM!
GWOORR!
SEIZE THIS, HOOF-BOY!
UGHNN!

A CRASS AFFRONT. *AND* IN THE ROYAL THRONE ROOM NO LESS.
THEY WILL PAY FOR THIS *UNFORGIVABLE* BREACH OF PROTOCOL, MY QUEEN!
HELLS*TEETH*, PHYLA! THIS IS THE *SECOND* FIGHT YOU'VE GOT ME INTO IN A SINGLE DAY!
WHEN THIS IS DONE, YOU AND I ARE GOING TO HAVE A LITTLE CHAT ABOUT YOUR NEW *ATTITUDE.*
PETE, WHEN *THIS* IS DONE, WE'RE GOING TO BE TOO *BUSY* SAYING *"HOW THE ☠☠☠☠ DID WE SURVIVE THAT?!"*

KNOWHERE, GUARDIAN'S HQ.
I COULDN'T SLEEP.

HAS THERE BEEN ANY WORD FROM THE TEAMS, MANTIS?
STAR-LORD'S PEOPLE ARE NOT ANSWERING THEIR PASSPORT COMS, MOONDRAGON.
WE PRESUME THIS MEANS THEY ARE IN CONFERENCE WITH INHUMAN ROYALTY AND CANNOT BE INTERRUPTED.
AS FOR RACCOON AND OTHERS WHO WENT WITH HIM, WE HAVE VERY MUCH LOST CONTACT.
IT IS AS IF SIGNAL FROM THEM IS JAMMED.
NONE OF THAT SOUNDS LIKE GOOD NEWS.
IT SOUNDINK TO COSMO LIKE BUSINESS AS USUAL.
WITH GUARDIANS OF GALAXY, EVEN DULL MOMENTS ARE QUITE FRAUGHT.

I'VE BEEN MEANING TO ASK...
WHAT'S A STARHAWK?
WHAT?

STARHAWK.
THE WORD'S BEEN IN MY HEAD EVER SINCE I CAME ON BOARD KNOWHERE.
DID EITHER OF YOU PUT IT THERE?

DEBRIEF LOG: ADAM WARLOCK (COSMIC BEING, ENHANCED BIOLOGY, METAPHYSICAL ENERGY MANIPULATION)
VULCAN WAS...STRONG. TERRIFYINGLY STRONG. HE'S AN OMEGA LEVEL MUTANT. I'VE SELDOM ENCOUNTERED A BEING SO POTENT.
IN SECONDS, HE HAD ROBBED SO MUCH POWER FROM ME, I NO LONGER HAD THE RESERVES TO TRANSPORT MYSELF CLEAR.
ALL I COULD DO WAS TRY TO EVADE HIM...
FZAAAM FZAAAM
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
ARE YOU RUNNING AWAY?
JUST CREATING A LITTLE ELBOW ROOM.
WHUD
GUUHHH!

THAT HURT. YOU HURT ME.
ZCHOOM
UGHK!
JUST STAY STILL AND DIE.
I'VE DIED SEVERAL TIMES. IT'S NOT ALL IT'S CRACKED UP TO BE.
KTHOOM
GAAAHHH!

YOU WILL SURRENDER IMMEDIATELY.
GET AWAY FROM ME! LEAVE ME ALONE!
UGHNN!
MAGIQUE! CRIPPLE HIM!
YES, MENTOR!
THERE! HE'S SNARED!
WHAT THE--?!
A SPELL-CASTER, EH? FASCINATING. THERE'S ONE OF EVERYTHING IN THE IMPERIAL GUARD.
I COMMEND YOU ON YOUR CRAFTWORK. THIS GLAMOUR IS BEAUTIFULLY WOVEN...

....UNFORTUNATELY, YOU'RE DEALING WITH A QUANTUM MAGICIAN.
I AM ILLUMINATED IN WAYS YOU CAN ONLY DREAM.
I AM WARLOCK!
YOUR SPELLS ARE MERE PARLOR TRICKS TO ME, GIRL...
YOUR RAW MAGIC IS MAGIC, HOWEVER.
I CAN'T MANIPULATE ENERGY THE WAY YOUR MASTER CAN, BUT I CAN RIP OUT YOUR GLAMOURS TO RECHARGE MYSELF!
NO! THAT HURTS! STOP IT! STOP IT!
OH BOO-HOO. LIFE HURTS SOMETIMES.
TELL YOUR MASTER THIS ISN'T OVER.
P-P-PLEASE...

WHERE IS HE? WHERE IS THE WARLOCK?
MENTOR! YOUR NEXT WORDS HAD BETTER NOT BE "HE'S ESCAPED, MAJESTOR."
THERE IS A VERY HIGH PERCENTAGE CHANCE THEY WILL BE, EMPEROR.
NO ONE DOES THAT TO ME, DO YOU HEAR?
NO ONE BURSTS IN ON ME AND MAKES DEMANDS!
NO ONE HURTS ME LIKE THAT!
I WANT HIM FOUND! I WANT HIM DEAD! I WANT HIS HEAD ON A SPIKE!
I... SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF EMPEROR VULCAN.
AND YOU! I THOUGHT YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE A TALENTED ADEPT!
MAGIQUE IS TOO WEAK TO ANSWER FOR HERSELF, MAJESTOR, BUT I CAN SEE THE TRUTH IN HER MIND.
HER DUEL WITH THE INTRUDER WAS NOT ENTIRELY ONE-SIDED.
SHE WAS ABLE TO PLACE A WITCH-MARK ON HIM.
IF HE'S MARKED, HE CAN'T ESCAPE. EVER.
HE COULD FLEE TO ANOTHER UNIVERSE, AND WE WOULD STILL FIND HIM...
...FIND HIM, AND FINISH HIM.

ATTILAN.

NO! THIS STOPS RIGHT NOW!

THIS IS NOT HOW WE BEHAVE BEFORE THE THRONE!

THIS IS NOT HOW WE TREAT GUESTS!

SHKOOM

CRYSTAL, SHE BARED A BLADE AT THE QUEEN!

WITH RESPECT, COUSIN GORGON, SO WHAT?

AND SHE BLASTED ME.

I'M SURE YOU'LL GET BETTER.

YOUR INTERVENTION IS UNNECESSARY, SISTER.

THE SITUATION HAS BEEN CONTAINED.

SITUATION? THESE PEOPLE HAVE COME HERE WITH *LEGITIMATE* CONCERNS!

WE SHOULD HEAR THEM OUT! AND WE SHOULD *CERTAINLY* DISCOVER IF THERE IS ANY EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THEIR CONCERNS!

THEIR NOTIONS ARE BASED UPON FEAR AND SPECULATION. THEY ARE *SCARE-MONGERING.*

NO!
HOLY ☠☠☠☠.
PHYLA? OH, DAS'T.
PHYLA, WHAT ARE YOU DOING? LET HER GO!
THESE... PEOPLE...DON'T UNDERSTAND ANY OTHER LANGUAGE, STAR-LORD...
...PERHAPS NOW THEY'LL LISTEN.
ARE YOU NUTS? LET HER GO!
IN THE NAME OF RANDAC, DON'T MAKE THIS WORSE! I WAS TRYING TO HELP YOU! I WAS TRYING TO SPEAK FOR YOU!

WE DON'T DO THIS! WE DON'T THREATEN LIVES!
YOU JUST CROSSED A LINE, PHYLA-VELL!
YOU JUST TOOK AWAY ANY MORAL AUTHORITY WE HAD WHEN WE WALKED IN HERE!
SOMETIMES YOU'VE GOT TO--
LET HER GO! NOW!
MANTIS? IT'S PETER. TRANSPORT US OUT OF HERE... FAST.
YOUR HIGHNESS, YOU HAVE MY APOLOGIES.
THIS ISN'T HOW I WANTED THIS TO GO AT ALL.
KNOWHERE.
THE CORTEX HAS GONE INTO CASCADE.
SOMETHINK NON-STANDARD IS TELEPORTINK THROUGH. STAND BY!
IT'S WARLOCK. CAN'T YOU HEAR HIS MIND?
WELL, AREN'T YOU BEINK SUPER-DUPER-TELEPATH TODAY?

ADAM?
ADAM, WHERE ARE THE OTHERS?
I DON'T KNOW. WE GOT SEPARATED.
YOU LOOK PALE. DIFFERENT.

NO, I'M FINE. REALLY.
HE CAME FACE TO FACE WITH VULCAN. HE BARELY ESCAPED WITH HIS LIFE.
VULCAN'S A MONSTER. THERE'S ABSOLUTELY NO NEGO-TIATING WITH HIM.
AND I HAVE A SHARP PAIN SUDDENLY, THAT--

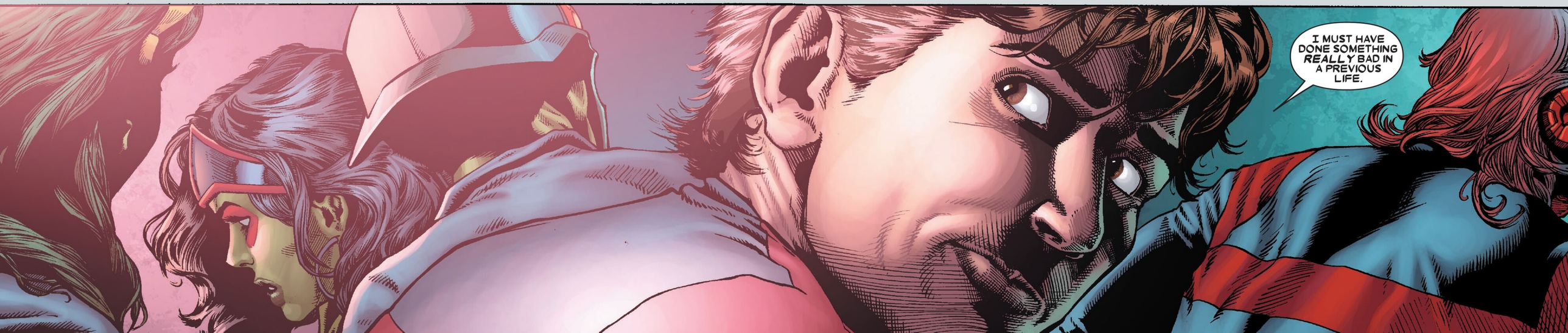
OH. OH NO.
I...
SHE MARKED ME. THE IMPERIAL GUARD MAGIC-USER LEFT A WITCH-MARK ON ME.
OH, THAT'S NOT GOOD AT ALL.

INCOMINK! PETER'S TEAM IS COMINK BACK!

--UNDISCIPLINED UNBELIEVABLE ☠☠☠☠-HEADED TRIGGER-HAPPY BEHAVIOR!
I'VE A GOOD MIND TO JUST KICK HER OFF THIS TEAM!

AREN'T YOU GOING TO ASK ME WHAT HAPPENED?
COSMO IS SEEINK SOME OF IT FOR HIMSELF.
HUH?
OH NO. OH YOU ARE ***** KIDDING ME WITH THIS!
I TOLD YOU TO LET HER GO!
AND I TOLD YOU TO GROW SOME.
DON'T YOU SEE? NOW WE'VE GOT A BARGAINING CHIP.
NOW WE CAN FORCE THEM TO NEGOTIATE!
THIS IS RIDICULOUS! RELEASE ME NOW!
OH PHYLA...
BY TAKING HOSTAGES? ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR FREAKING MIND?
HONESTLY PHYLA, Y--
OKAY, NOW I'M SMELLING DOG BISCUITS. AND NOT COSMO'S BRAND.
UH, WHAT'S THAT GLOW?
MULTIPLE TELEPORT SIGNALS! TWO TOTALLY DIFFERENT SIGNATURES!
IT IS NOT CONTINUUM CORTEX, IT IS AUTONOMOUS SITE-TO-SITE!
SECURITY! SECURITY TO CORTEX NOW!
I THINK WE REALLY PISSED SOMEBODY OFF.
YOU HAVE NO IDEA.

THERE SHE IS!
WITCH-MARK LOCATED!


I MUST HAVE DONE SOMETHING *REALLY* BAD IN A PREVIOUS LIFE.

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY 15

THE CONTINUUM CORTEX, KNOWHERE.
DEBRIEF LOG: STAR-LORD (PETER JASON QUILL, HALF-TERRAN/HALF-SPARTOI, NO ENHANCED ABILITIES)
I TURN AROUND, THERE'S A BIG FLASH OF LIGHT, AND THAT FREAKY TELEPORTING *BULLDOG* HAS LANDED THE *INHUMANS* SMACK IN OUR FACES.
INCLUDING HIS ROYAL PAIN-IN-THE-BUTT-NESS, *BLACK BOLT.*
HE DIDN'T LOOK PLEASED...

"... AND THAT WAS ONLY HALF OF OUR PROBLEMS."

STOP! WAIT!

ELITE! SECURE THE PERSON OF PRINCESS CRYSTAL AND PUT DOWN ANYONE WHO OPPOSES US!

OKAY, SOMEHOW WE'VE JUST TAKEN DELIVERY OF A COMPACT, ONE-ROOM EDITION OF THE SHI'AR-INHUMAN WAR!

IT IS THE ENEMY KING IN PERSON! IMPERIAL GUARD, ATTACK!

HALT! SIT! STAY!

I ALLOWED YOU TO TAKE ME, YOU VIOLENT LITTLE GIRL! I'M TRYING TO HELP YOU!
OWWW!
COULD YOU KICK HER TOO WHILE SHE'S DOWN THERE?
JUST TELL ME ABOUT THIS WARNING YOU WERE TRYING TO DELIVER TO THE THRONE OF ATTILAN!
HOW CAN YOU BE SO SURE THAT SPACE ITSELF IS THREATENED BY THE VIOLENCE OF THIS WAR?
BECAUSE I'VE SEEN IT, LADY! I'VE SEEN SPACE RIP OPEN!
MANTIS! SHOW THE NICE LADY SOME OF THE FISSURES WE'VE HAD TO DEAL WITH!
YES, PETER!
SORRY ABOUT HER. SHE'S NEW.
SO WHAT WILL MAKE UP FOR THAT? FLOWERS? A CARD?
SORRY WON'T BE ENOUGH, SIR. YOU HAVE INSULTED AND ANGERED THE INHUMAN ROYAL FAMILY.
OH! GREAT RANDAC! I SEE SUCH TERRIBLE DESTRUCTION!
THIS WAR IS A DISASTER WAITING TO HAPPEN.
COME ON! SHE'S OUR PRISONER! SHE'S OUR BARGAINING CHIP!
COMRADE STAR-LORD, THIS IS COSMO! WHATEVER YOU ARE DOINK, DO IT FASTER!
THE SHI'AR HAVE TELEPATH OF THEIR OWN!

GUARDSMAN ORACLE! THIS IS OUR CHANCE TO ELIMINATE THE DESPISED BLACK BOLT!
REMOVE THIS TELEKINETIC OBSTRUCTION AND BRAIN-FRY THE TELEPATH CASTING IT!
YES, MENTOR. I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF EMPEROR VULCAN.

NYAAAHHHH!

UHKK!
THE SHIELD IS DOWN! THE SPELL IS BROKEN!
FOR THE KING!

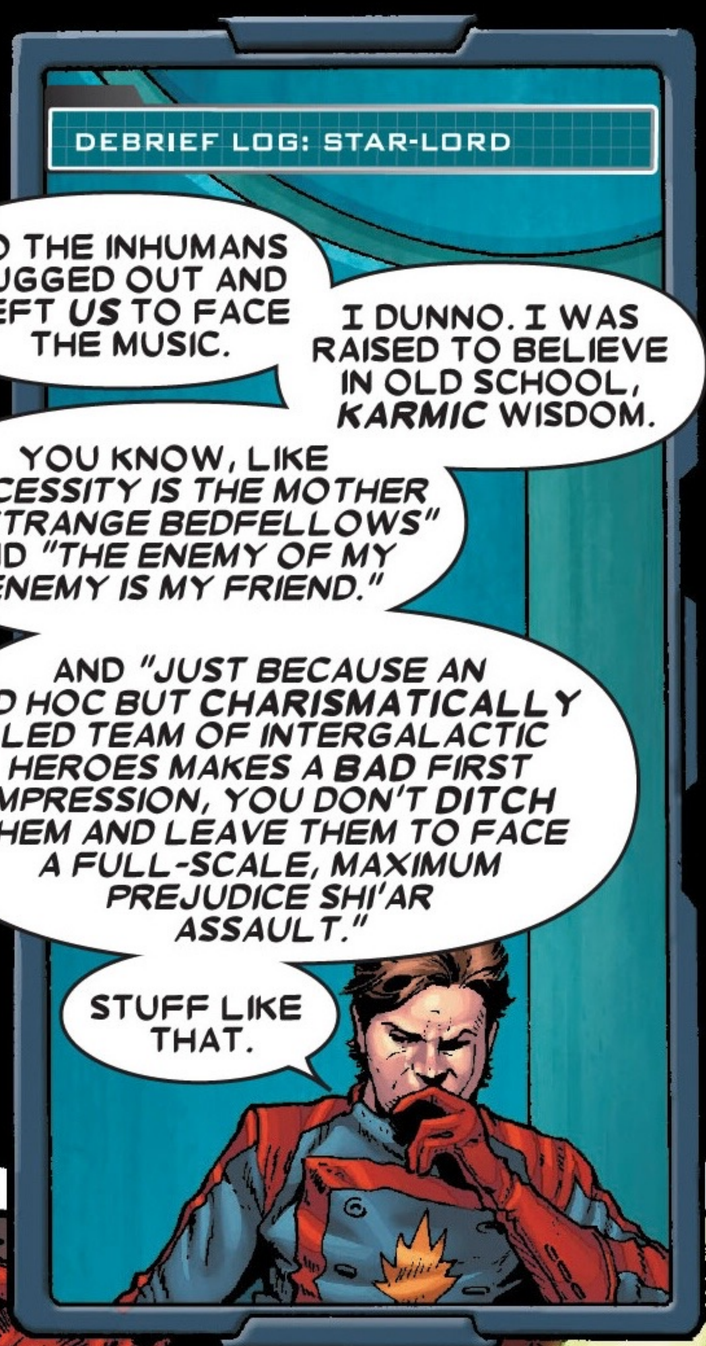
FOR ATTILAN!
UH...FOR CLEVELAND?!
YOUR COMBAT SKILLS ARE EXCEPTIONAL.
I WILL, HOWEVER, FIND A WEAKNESS IN YOUR TECHNIQUE.
INDEED. YOU WILL DEFEAT ME TWO POINT SIX MINUTES FROM NOW.
PROVIDED YOU ARE CONSCIOUS.
GNHH!
STAR-LORD!
THEIR BIG, BAD ÷TIK!÷ BOSS IN BLACK IS COMING RIGHT AT YOU!

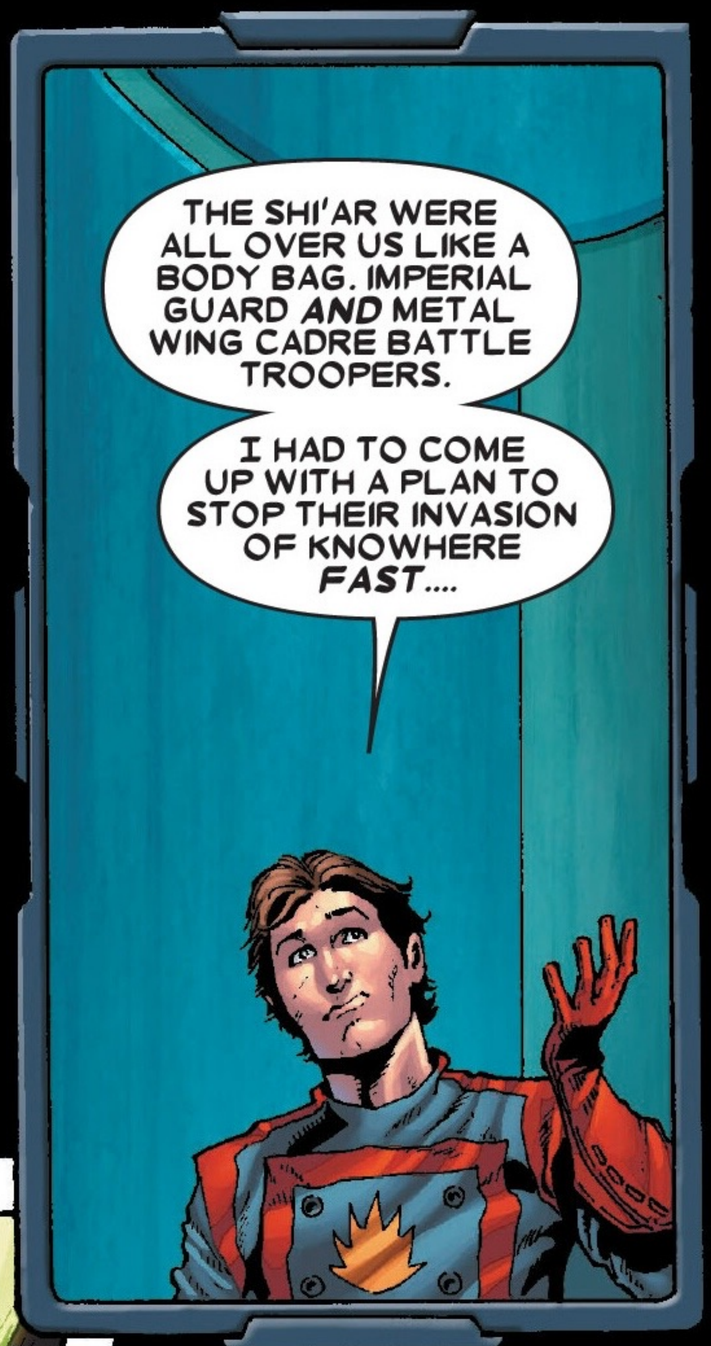
YOUR HIGHNESS! YOUR HIGHNESS, THERE'S NO NEED FOR--
YEOOWWCHH!
BLACK BOLT! MY LORD, LISTEN!
THEY HAVEN'T HARMED ME!
WE REALLY HAVEN'T! NO ONE LIKES HARMING! HARMING IS BAD!
TELL HIM!
WE MUST UNITE WITH THE GUARDIANS AGAINST OUR COMMON FOE! WE MUST LISTEN TO THEIR WA--
GRUUUHHHH!
RENEGADE TELEPATH IS INCAPACITATED.
ADVANCE!
MMMRHH..?
ARE YOU GOD?
FOR THE GLORY OF THE MAJESTOR, TAKE DOWN THE ENEMY KING!

MY LORD, TOGETHER WE COULD--
OW!
EARGHH!
NYAAAHH!
BEWARE! I AM DETECTING ELEVATED LEVELS OF--
BLACK BOLT! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
THIS BATTLE IS NOT OVER!
YOU WERE ALL WE CAME FOR, CRYSTAL.
WE WILL NOT EXPOSE THE KING UNNECESSARILY TO SHI'AR FORCES.
LOCKJAW...
YEOW!
KRA-KOOM

FZZZM
...RETURN US TO ATTILAN! NOW!

THE INHUMAN FORCES HAVE FLED, MENTOR!
MOST UNFORTUNATE!
STRIKE FORCE! REVERT TO ORIGINAL MISSION PARAMETERS! SEIZE THIS STATION AND BRING ME THE HEAD OF THE INSURGENT KNOWN AS WARLOCK!


DEBRIEF LOG: STAR-LORD
SO THE INHUMANS BUGGED OUT AND LEFT US TO FACE THE MUSIC.
I DUNNO. I WAS RAISED TO BELIEVE IN OLD SCHOOL, KARMIC WISDOM.
YOU KNOW, LIKE "NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF STRANGE BEDFELLOWS" AND "THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY IS MY FRIEND."
AND "JUST BECAUSE AN AD HOC BUT CHARISMATICALLY LED TEAM OF INTERGALACTIC HEROES MAKES A BAD FIRST IMPRESSION, YOU DON'T DITCH THEM AND LEAVE THEM TO FACE A FULL-SCALE, MAXIMUM PREJUDICE SHI'AR ASSAULT."
STUFF LIKE THAT.


THE SHI'AR WERE ALL OVER US LIKE A BODY BAG. IMPERIAL GUARD AND METAL WING CADRE BATTLE TROOPERS.
I HAD TO COME UP WITH A PLAN TO STOP THEIR INVASION OF KNOWHERE FAST....

"SCATTER"? THAT'S YOUR PLAN? "SCATTER"?
YOU GOT A PROBLEM WITH IT?
HEY, AS AN ALTERNATIVE ÷TIK!÷ TO "GET SHOT AN UNHEALTHY NUMBER OF TIMES," IT'S GOLDEN!

MY MIND CANNOT FIND ADAM, GAMORA, PHYLA OR MOONDRAGON.
THEY ALL SCATTER IN OPPOSITE DIRECTION.
COSMO CANNOT REACH THEM EITHER. THAT NASTY IMPERIAL GUARD TEEPER ORACLE IS STILL BLOCKINK US!

LET'S HOPE *COMS* WORK, THEN, BECAUSE *"SCATTER"* WAS ONLY *HALF* OF MY PLAN!

DELEGATE GORANI! *COUNCIL DELEGATE GORANI,* THIS IS STAR-LORD!

KNOWHERE IS UNDER ASSAULT BY *SHI'AR FORCES!* REQUEST YOU MOBILIZE STATION SECURITY AND ALERT THE LUMINALS!

WE NEED A *UNITED FRONT* HERE!

ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL CHAMBERS, KNOWHERE.

KNOWHERE IS A NEUTRAL FACILITY, QUILL. WE WILL *NOT* ENGAGE THE SHI'AR.

ALL SPECIES DELEGATIONS HAVE WITHDRAWN INTO SHELTER.

GIVE YOURSELVES UP TO THESE ENEMIES YOU HAVE BROUGHT HERE. THEN THEY WILL LEAVE KNOWHERE ALONE.

GET REAL! THE SHI'AR AIM TO ANNEX THE WHOLE PLACE! AT LEAST GET THE LUMINALS OUT HERE!

NOT AN OPTION. XARTH HAS A *NON-AGGRESSION PACT* WITH THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM..

YOU HAVE BROUGHT THIS ON *YOURSELF,* QUILL. YOU WILL FACE IT *ALONE.* GORANI OUT.

GORANI? GORANI, YOU SON OF A SCHLAG!

GUYS? IT TURNS OUT *"SCATTER" IS* ALL I'VE GOT!

THE CONTINUUM CORTEX.

REPORT, HUSSAR.

WARLOCK AND HIS CONFEDERATES HAVE FLED INTO THE DEPTHS OF THE STATION. OUR FORCES ARE SEARCHING THE FACILITY BY SECTION.

WE WILL FIND THEM AND *ELIMINATE* THEM AS THE EMPEROR ORDERED.

WARLOCK WILL BE THE *EASIEST* TO LOCATE. THE *WITCH-MARK* MAGIQUE PLACED ON HIM IS *INDELIBLE.*

IT LED US HERE TO KNOWHERE. IT WILL LEAD US TO HIM LIKE AN ISOTOPE MARKER, NO MATTER *WHERE* HE HIDES.

THIS FACILITY IS OF CONSIDERABLE SIZE AND COMPLEXITY. I INTEND TO *SEIZE* IT AS A WAY STATION FOR THE IMPERIUM.

WE WILL NEED REINFORCEMENTS TO PROPERLY SECURE THE STATION.
VOYAGER MUST OPEN A PORTAL AND BRING ANOTHER REGIMENT THROUGH FROM THE AERIE.
VOYAGER HAS EXHAUSTED HIS TALENT FOR NOW. HE REQUIRES RECOVERY TIME.
THIS SYSTEM, HOWEVER, IS A SOPHISTICATED DISPLACEMENT DEVICE.
NOT ONLY CAN I EMPLOY IT TO BRING REINFORCEMENTS...
...I CAN ALSO USE IT TO DEPLOY SHI'AR STRIKE FORCES ANYWHERE IN TIME AND SPACE.
OUR TRANSMAT RANGE WILL EXCEED EVEN THAT OF THE INHUMAN TELEPORT CADRES. NO TARGET-WORLD WILL BE BEYOND THE IMPERIUM'S REACH.
THE EMPEROR WILL GARLAND YOU FOR DELIVERING THIS PRIZE TO HIM, MENTOR. I--
ONE MOMENT.
MENTOR, OUR FORCES HAVE ENGAGED TWO OF THE FUGITIVES IN THE SUB-LEVELS.
SUBLEVEL NINE.
MORE OF THEM! EVERY DAS'T WAY WE TURN!
I THINK OUR BEST BET IS TO HACK THROUGH THESE IDIOTS AND DISAPPEAR INTO THE CENTRAL VENT SYSTEM!
IT'S A BETTER PLAN THAN "SCATTER." HEATHER, WE--
HEY! WHERE'S HEATHER?
DON'T ASK ME...

"... I THOUGHT YOUR *GIRLFRIEND* WAS RIGHT BEHIND US."

CORE DECK LEVELS.

CLOSER. COME ON. YOU'RE ALMOST THERE.

THAT'S RIGHT.

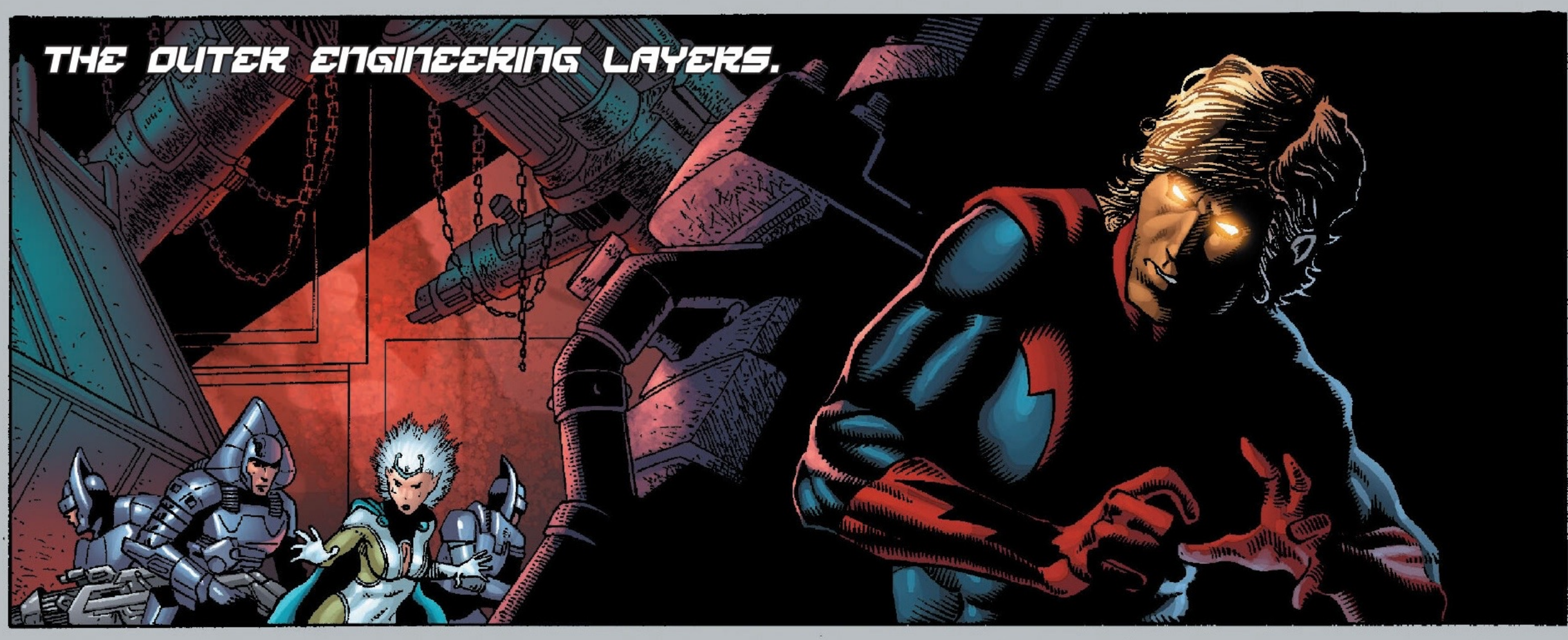
YOUR MIND IS INTERESTING, MOONDRAGON. IT FEELS NEWBORN. HAVE YOU ONLY BEEN ALIVE FOR A FEW DAYS?

YOU HAVE NOT YET STRENGTHENED OR CALLOUSED YOUR MIND WITH USE LIKE MANTIS, OR THAT OBSTINATE DOG.

IT IS PLIABLE.

KK-SHNNKKK

TRUST ME. I AM ONE WHO KNOWS.


THE OUTER ENGINEERING LAYERS.

HE'S CLOSE! *VERY* CLOSE!
I CAN *FEEL* THE PULSE OF THE WITCHMARK ON HIS SKIN! *STAY SHARP!*
HE IS A *WARLOCK*, GUARDSMAN MAGIQUE. WON'T HE ENCHANT OUR WEAPONS TO *MISS* HIM?

I HAVE ENCHANTED YOUR GUNS, SERGEANT. WHEN YOU SHOOT, YOU WILL *NOT* MISS THE ONE WHO IS WITCH-MARKED.
I'LL FLUSH HIM OUT. GET READY TO FIRE.
YES, GUARDSMAN MAGIQUE.

WARLOCK? THERE'S NO POINT HIDING.
YOU *CANNOT* ESCAPE. I HAVE MARKED YOU, AND IT HAS LED ME *UNNERRINGLY* ACROSS SPACE TO FIND YOU.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING? ARE YOU TRYING ONE LAST SPELL TO STOP ME?

JUST A LITTLE ONE.
SHARRA AND K'YTHRI!
SERGEANT! HE'S HERE! OPEN FIRE!
NO! WHAT ARE YOU DOING? WHAT ARE YO--
ZZBB
ZZZKK
CHMMMM
CHOOMMMM
KTOOM
WAIT! IT'S GUARDSMAN MAGIQUE!
BY THE SUNS, HOW COULD WE HAVE HIT HER?
THE WITCH-MARK! IT'S ON HER BODY!

I GAVE IT BACK TO HER.
IT WAS A DEMANDING, PAINFUL SPELL, BUT THE RESULT WAS WORTH IT.
EH?
NOW, SHI'AR...
...WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH YOU?
EEEAARRGGH!
AAIEEE!

DELEGATION LEVEL TWO.
OKAY, GUYS, NICE AND SLOW...
... MY VISOR'S READING FOUR IMPERIAL GUARD MEMBERS MOVING THIS WAY. LET'S JUMP THEM AS THEY G--
HUH?
HUH?
A NOSEBLEED?
A NOSEBLEED?
STARHAWK?!
OH, NOT NOW.
KZZZZZOOOMMMMMMMMCHH

THE CONTINUUM CORTEX.
THESE CONTROLS ARE SIMPLICITY ITSELF.
STAND BY WHILE I BRING THE FIRST DETACHMENT THROUGH.
WAIT...
THIS DISPLAY SUGGESTS THE CORTEX DEVICE HAS RECENTLY BEEN USED.
IT HAS! AND GUESS WHAT ELSE?
YOU'RE SURROUNDED!
YAAGHH!

THIS IS MENTOR! ALARM! ALARM!
WE NEED BACKUP NOW!
AHH, SHUDDUP!
KTANG
KTANG
THE ODDS LOOK TIGHT. DO YOU THINK WE CAN TAKE THEM ALL?
KTANG
I AM GROOT!
MY THOUGHTS EXACTLY.

SHOOT HIM! CUT HIM TO PIECES!
YEAH, COME ON. TRY.
UGHNN!
HOW'D YOU IDIOTS EVER GET AN IMPERIUM WITH GUNPLAY THAT WEAK?
EEARGH!
AIIGH!
THEY'VE LAUNCHED A COUNTER-ATTACK!
SHOULD I PREPARE A PORTAL FOR RETREAT?
FOR PITY'S SAKE, VOYAGER! THERE'S ONLY FOUR OF THEM! WE--
SHARRA AND K'YTHRI! THEY'RE TAKING US TO PIECES!

AND THE BAD NEWS DOESN'T STOP THERE.
SUPPRESSING FIRE! NOW!
VOYAGER! GET THAT PORTAL OPEN! FALL BACK!
GET OFF ME, LESSER FORM!
YOU WILL BE CRUSHED! EXTERMINATED!
I SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF EMPEROR VULCAN!
VULCAN? NEWSFLASH, BRAINIAC!
ABOUT THREE HOURS AGO, ME AND MY PALS, AND SOME FRIENDS CALLED THE STARJAMMERS, DELIVERED MAJESTRIX LILANDRA TO CHANDILAR!
YOUR BOSS IS OUT OF A JOB! THE TRUE EMPRESS IS BACK ON THE THRONE!
LILANDRA? HA, YOU FOOL! I RECEIVE INTELFEED.
THE USURPER LILANDRA NERAMANI WAS ASSASSINATED IN THE FIRST FEW MINUTES OF HER PATHETIC COUP!
WHAT? WHAT? NO!
UGHHNNN!
VOYAGER! EXIT PORTALS! NOW!
HURRY! ALL UNITS WITHDRAW!
SHE'S...SHE'S DEAD?

DEBRIEF LOG: GAMORA (ZEN-WHOBERIAN, ENHANCED BIOLOGY, ADVANCED COMBAT SKILLS)

WE DROVE THE SHI'AR SCUM *OUT*, THEN CODED A TELEPORT SHIELD TO BLOCK THEM FROM *RETURNING*.

IT FELT *GOOD* TO WIN A FIGHT. WE DON'T SEEM TO *MANAGE* THAT MUCH.

I DON'T KNOW *WHY* WE WEREN'T CELEBRATING.

DEBRIEF LOG: ROCKET RACCOON (EVOLVED MAMMAL, TACTICAL AND DEMOLITIONS EXPERTISE)

DEAD. I CAN'T BELIEVE IT. AFTER EVERYTHING WE DID.

I *REALLY* THOUGHT WE HAD MANAGED TO DO SOMETHING THAT WOULD *STOP* THIS WAR IN ITS TRACKS.

*!

NOW SHE'S GONE AND EVERYTHING'S *TEN* TIMES WORSE THAN BEFORE.

DEBRIEF LOG: ADAM WARLOCK (COSMIC BEING, ENHANCED BIOLOGY, METAPHYSICAL ENERGY MANIPULATION)

THE NEWS REGARDING LILANDRA NERAMANI WAS GRAVE ENOUGH.

SHE WAS OUR *BEST* HOPE OF STOPPING THIS CONFLICT FROM TEARING THE *GALAXY* APART.

ON TOP OF *THAT*, WE COULD FIND NO TRACE OF PETER, MANTIS, BUG, MR. FLAG *OR* COSMO.

THEN PHYLA LOCATED MOONDRAGON...

GUARDIANS CONTROL CENTER.

WHAT DO YOU *MEAN*, MISS? *HOW* DID STARHAWK GET INTO YOUR MIND?

I DON'T KNOW. IT'S LIKE MY MIND IS TOO *NEW*. IT'S NOT... *TOUGHENED* YET. I COULDN'T SHUT HER OUT.

AND YOU THINK SHE *DID* SOMETHING TO PETER AND THE OTHERS?

I DON'T LIKE IT. IF ONLY WE KNEW MORE ABOUT *STARHAWK*. IF ONLY I COULD *REMEMBER* M--

GGROOKKKK

JEEZ. WHAT THE FLARK WAS *THAT?*

IT CAME FROM THE STATION SUPERSTRUCTURE. IT--

OH!

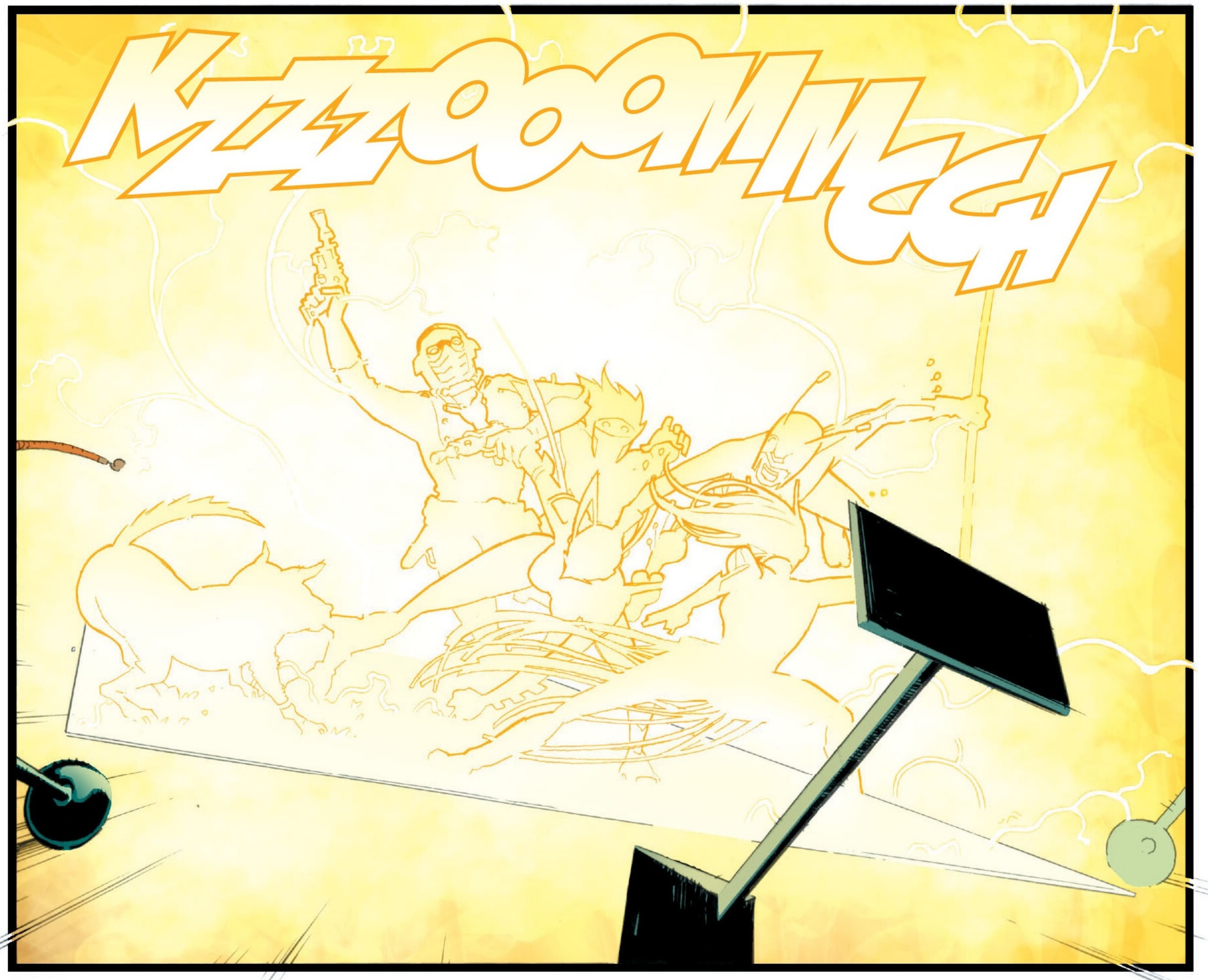
CAN'T YOU FEEL THAT? ANY OF YOU? CAN'T YOU *FEEL* IT?

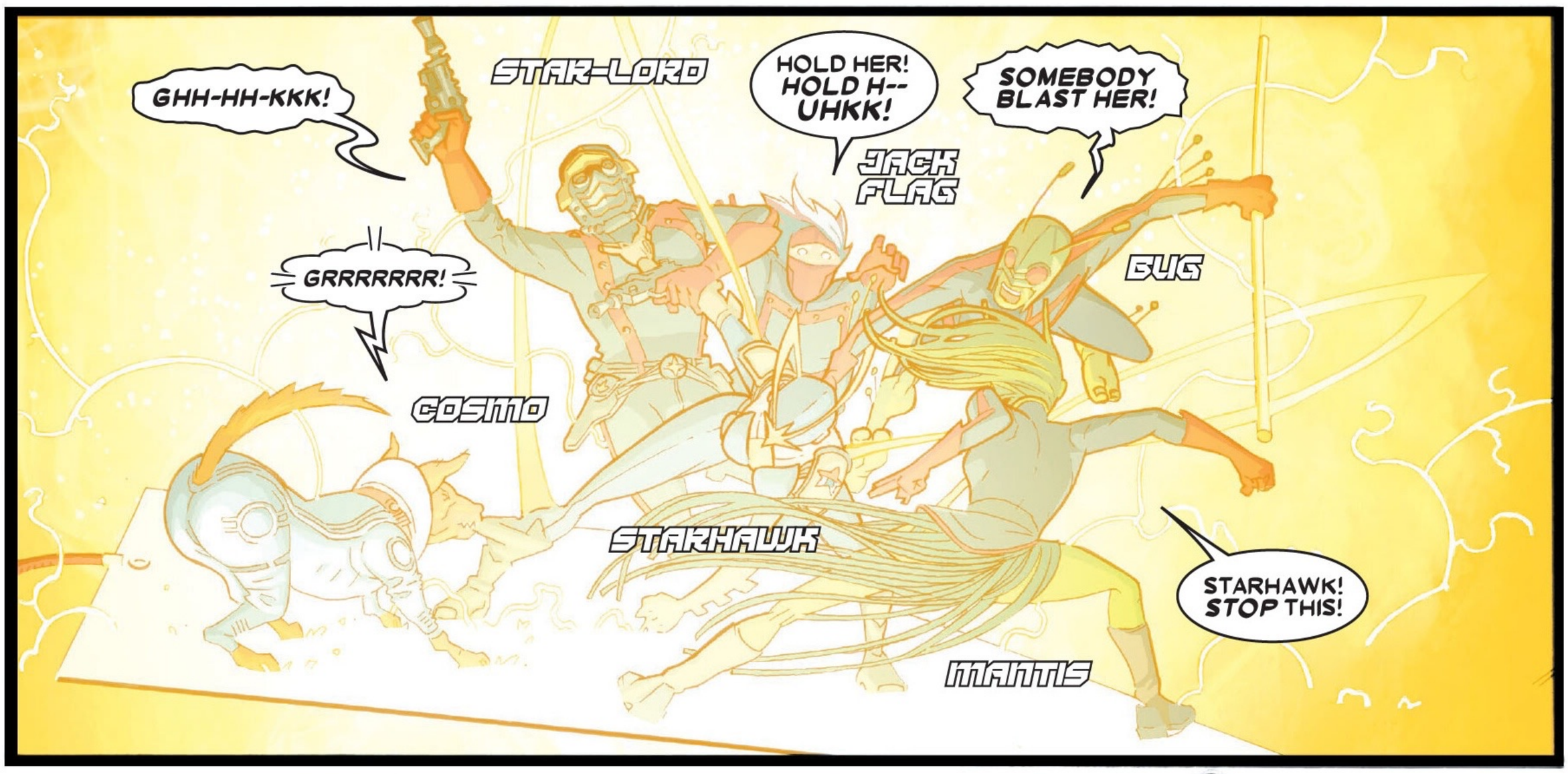
"KNOWHERE JUST CAME BACK TO LIFE!"
ADAM WARLOCK! HEAR ME!
THERE IS LITTLE TIME!
THE FATE OF ALL EXISTENCE DEPENDS UPON YOU!

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY 16

AVENGERS MANSION.
THURSDAY,
JANUARY 12, 3009 A.D.

FTZZT
PROTOTYPE TIME MACHINE
Victor Von Doom
Latveria, circa late 20th Century


KZZOOMMGH


GHH-HH-KKK!
STAR-LORD
HOLD HER! HOLD H-- UHKK!
SOMEBODY BLAST HER!
JACK FLAG
GRRRRRRR!
BUG
COSMO
STARHAWK
STARHAWK! STOP THIS!
MANTIS

ZOOMM
GLADLY.
-TIK!-
UGHN!
YELP!

STARHAWK, YOU CRAZY, FREAKAZOID NUTJOB!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO US? WHERE HAVE YOU TAKEN US?
TALK! RIGHT NOW, OR I GO HIGH EXPLOSIVES ON YOUR ASS!
YOU HAVE SELECTED: ARMOR-PIERCING DETONATORS.
RCHKK
RCHKK

YEOOWWCHH!
YEAH?
NOT ON OUR WATCH.

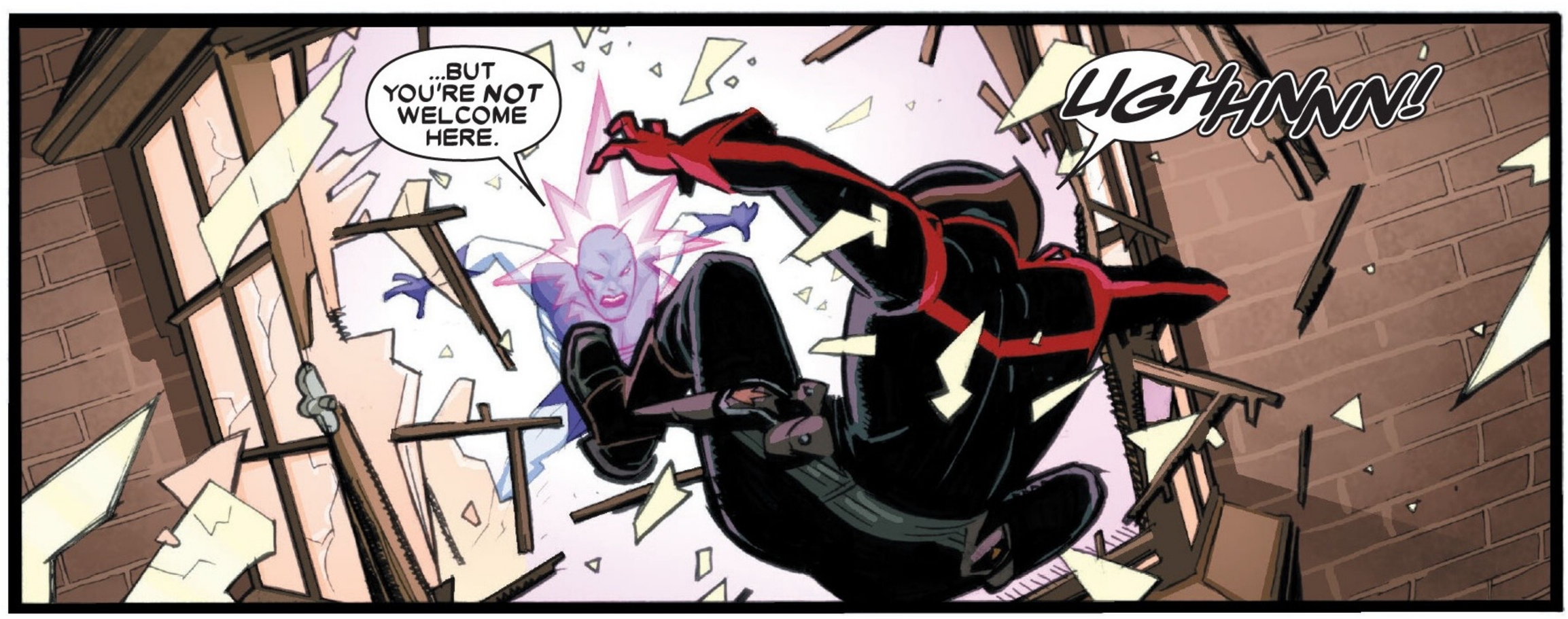
WHO ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO BE?
WE'RE THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY.
UH... WHAT?
MARTINEX (PLUTONIAN HUMAN, PHOTONIC MANIPULATION DERIVED FROM CRYSTALLINE PHYSIOLOGY.)
VANCE ASTRO (ASTRONAUT/EXPLORER TURNED HERO, PSYCHOKINESIS.)
CHARLIE-27 (JOVIAN HUMAN, HYPER-STRENGTH DERIVED FROM GENETICALLY ENHANCED MUSCLE DENSITY.)
YONDU (CENTAURIAN, WEAPONS MASTER.)

WAIT! YOU'RE WHO?
YOU GUYS GOT SOME GAME IN YOU.
NHH! NICE PUNCH. I ALMOST FELT THAT.
HOW'S MINE?
GNNHH!
WHOOA! FLAG'S--TIK!-- DOWN!
AGAIN.
YOU'RE A DOG?
AND YOU ARE PAIN IN BACKSIDE WITH YOUR ZAPPY TRICKS!
COSMO WILL REACH INTO YOUR MIND AND SWITCH YOUR BRAIN OFF--
WAIT! I SEE! IN YOUR SURFACE THOUGHTS!
"BOZHE MOI! YOU REALLY ARE GUARDIANS OF GALAXY!"

THAT WON'T WORK. YOUR ARROW IS MADE OF LIVING METAL. IT TOLD ME WHERE IT WAS GOING.

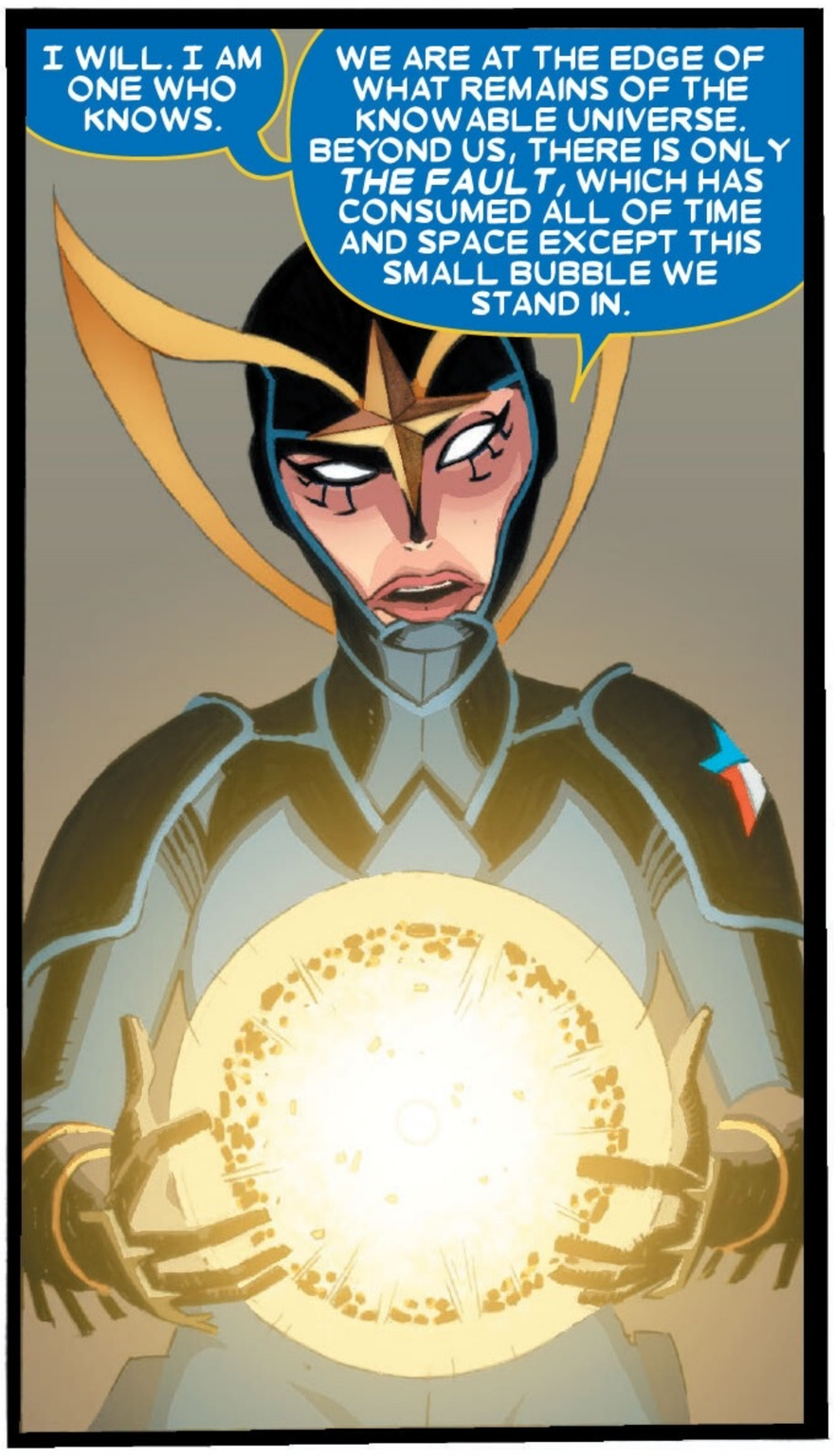
I LIKE YOU, GREEN WOMAN.

MAJOR VICTORY?! HOW DID YOU GET HERE? AND WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR SHIELD?
I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE...OR HOW YOU THINK YOU KNOW ME...


...BUT YOU'RE NOT WELCOME HERE.
LIGHNNN!

OKAY...
SOMEBODY CALL A TIME OUT AND TELL ME WHAT THE ☠☠☠☠ IS GOING ON.

EARTH, OVERCOME
ANYONE? PLEASE?


I WILL. I AM ONE WHO KNOWS.
WE ARE AT THE EDGE OF WHAT REMAINS OF THE KNOWABLE UNIVERSE. BEYOND US, THERE IS ONLY *THE FAULT*, WHICH HAS CONSUMED ALL OF TIME AND SPACE EXCEPT THIS SMALL BUBBLE WE STAND IN.

WHAT IS *THE FAULT?*
IT IS THE CONSEQUENCE OF *THE ERROR* THAT HAPPENS IN YOUR TIME. I HAVE BROUGHT YOU TO THE FUTURE TENSE SO THAT YOU CAN WITNESS IT AND *BELIEVE* ME.
THIS IS WHAT YOU WERE TRYING TO EXPLAIN EVERY TIME YOU OR A *VERSION* OF YOU VISITED US?
THIS?

THE ERROR IN YOUR TIME CAUSES SO MUCH DAMAGE THAT EVEN TIME *ITSELF* HERE IS IN FLUX.
THE FUTURE TENSE CHANGES FROM *ONE* NIGHTMARISH POSSIBILITY TO THE NEXT.
NONE OF US WITNESSED THAT, STAR-LORD.
FROM WHAT WE UNDERSTAND OF IT, STARHAWK IS THE ONLY ONE WHO REMEMBERS THE CHANGES. SHE IS *UNIQUE*, YOU SEE.
HECK! SHE'S SCHIZO BUT SHE'S *GOOD PEOPLE.*

EACH TIME THIS REALITY SHIFTS TO *ANOTHER* ITERATION, I USE THE *OLD MACHINE* TO TRAVEL TO YOUR TIME.
EACH VISIT, I TRY TO *STOP* THE FUTURE TENSE FROM HAPPENING THIS WAY. EACH VISIT, I *FAIL.*

BECAUSE WITH EACH VISIT, I LEARN *MORE* ABOUT THE ERROR, AND REALIZE HOW *IMMENSE* IT IS.
AT FIRST, I BELIEVED IT WAS *MAJOR VICTORY.* BUT HE IS JUST A *SYMPTOM* OF TIME UNRAVELING, NOT ITS *CAUSE.*
THEN I THOUGHT IT WAS *YOUR* TEAM AND *YOUR* IDEAS AND ACTIVITIES.

YEAH, I CAN'T *BELIEVE* YOU'RE CALLED THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY *TOO!*
WHAT ARE THE *CHANCES?*
SAY, WHERE'D YA GET THE *NAME* FROM?

OH, RIGHT. I GET IT. "NOT THE TIME FOR CHIT-CHAT, CHARLIE."
IT'S JUST THAT WE HAVEN'T HAD VISITORS IN THE LONGEST TIME.

ON MY LAST VISIT, YOU DETAINED ME.
THIS GAVE ME TIME TO STUDY, TO PROBE.
THEN THE FORCES OF THE SHI'AR AND THE INHUMANS ARRIVED ON YOUR STATION, AND MY MIND WAS BROUGHT INTO CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE THOUGHTS OF THE INHUMAN KING.
AND AT LAST I SAW THE TRUTH.

BLACK BOLT WILL MAKE THE ERROR.
BLACK BOLT WILL CAUSE THE FAULT.
HE WILL DETONATE A DEVICE CALLED A T-BOMB. IT WILL CAUSE A CASCADE COLLAPSE OF SPACE AND TIME.

THOSE STUPID ☠☠☠☠☠☠☠!
THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT ADAM WARLOCK HAS BEEN WARNING US OF ALL ALONG. THE UNIVERSE IS TOO FRAGILE TO WITHSTAND THE PUNISHMENT OF A STELLAR WAR.

SO YOU FOUND THE ERROR! YOU FOUND OUT WHO WAS TO BLAME!
WHY THE BLAZES DIDN'T YOU STOP THIS BLACK BOLT MANIAC?
IT TAKES ALMOST ALL OF MY ENERGY MANIPULATION TALENTS TO MAINTAIN A TETHER TO THE OLD MACHINE.
I HADN'T THE STRENGTH TO FIGHT THEM, JUST ENOUGH TO RETURN...

PZOW

PZOW

MARTINEX! GET THESE GOOD PEOPLE TO THE OLD MACHINE! IT SHOULD HAVE HAD LONG ENOUGH TO CYCLE BACK TO READY!

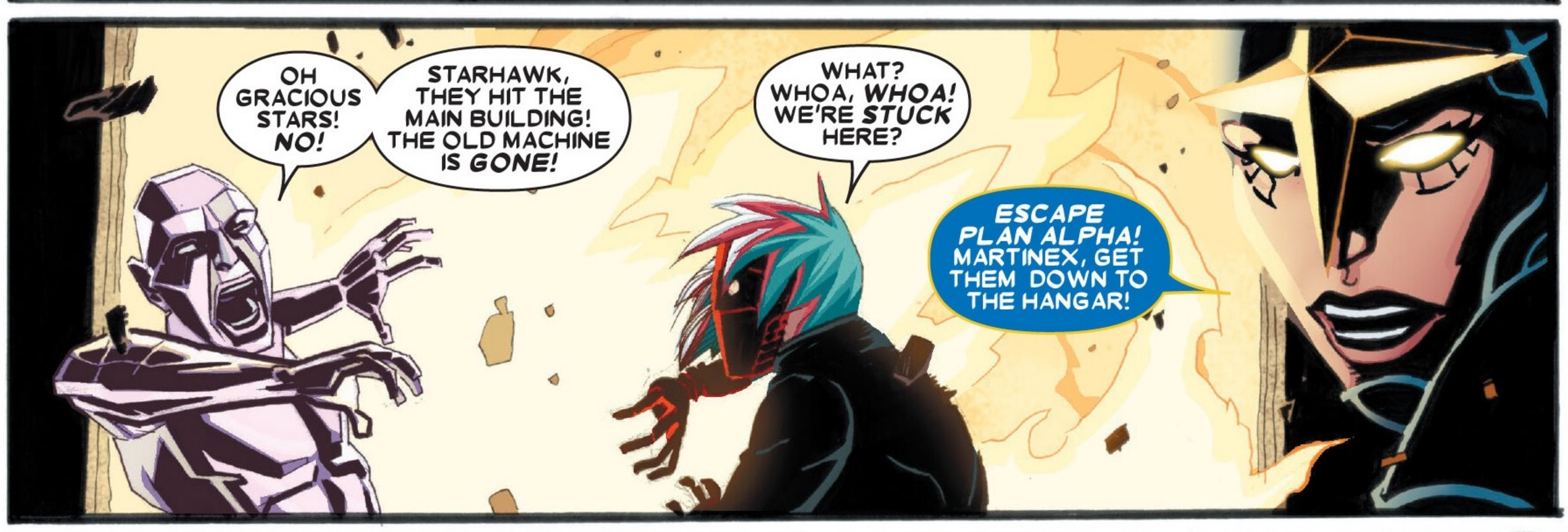
THE BADOON! THE BADOON HAVE FOUND US!

DAMMIT, STARHAWK! WHEN YOU BROUGHT THESE GUESTS BACK WITH YOU, THE ENERGY BURST MUST HAVE BEEN BRIGHTER THAN USUAL!

BADOON? HEY, I'VE MET THOSE--TIK!--SLIMY LIZARDS AND I DO NOT WANT A REUNION!

BY THE THREE SUNS! ZOM BLITZ-TROOPS ARE *TELEPORTING IN! BEWARE!*
WHERE DID THE BADOON *COME* FROM? I THOUGHT YOU SAID *EVERYTHING* WAS DEAD AND GONE?!
YEAH... EVERYTHING EXCEPT THE *BADOON!*

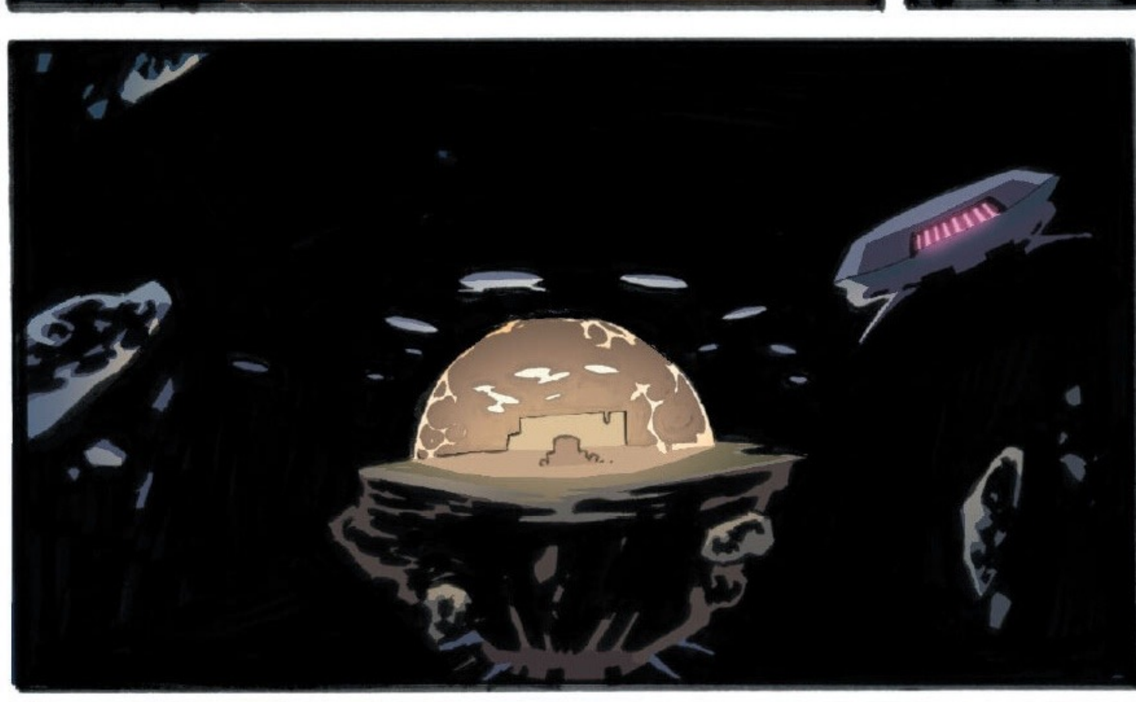
THEY'RE THE *LAST SPECIES STANDING*, FRIEND! THEY CLUNG ON LIKE *COCKROACHES* AS THE UNIVERSE SHRANK AROUND THEM!
THIS LITTLE BUBBLE OF REALITY IS *THEIRS!* THEY USE THEIR *TECH* TO KEEP THE FAULT AT BAY, AND THEY EXTERMINATE *ANY* OTHER SURVIVORS THEY FIND SHARING THE LIFEBOAT WITH THEM!
THE END OF THE UNIVERSE IS ALL ABOUT THE BADOON'S *SURVIVAL*, AND EVERYTHING *ELSE* GETS *VAPORIZED!*


OH GRACIOUS STARS! *NO!*
STARHAWK, THEY HIT THE MAIN BUILDING! THE OLD MACHINE IS *GONE!*
WHAT? WHOA, *WHOA!* WE'RE *STUCK* HERE?
ESCAPE PLAN ALPHA! MARTINEX, GET THEM DOWN TO THE HANGAR!

WHY? WHAT ARE *YOU* GOING TO DO?
SHE'S GOINK TO...
BOZHE MOI. SHE IS GOINK TO BUY US TIME TO ESCAPE.

BADOON! MOST OF YOU WILL NOT SURVIVE THE NEXT THIRTY SECONDS!
TRUST ME ON THIS...

...I AM ONE WHO KNOWS.



UHOOOOMMMIIFF

NOT EVEN THE 'HAWK SURVIVES SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

ONE MORE SOLDIER GONE.

I'M SO SORRY. WE REALLY GOT HER WRONG.

FORGET IT. THERE'S NO TIME FOR GRIEF ANYMORE. NO TIME FOR ANYTHING.

THE CAPTAIN AMERICA IS A FAST SHIP, BUT NOW THAT THEY'VE SMOKED US OUT, WE WON'T OUTRUN THE BADOON FOR LONG. THERE'S NOWHERE TO RUN TO.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, COSMO?
LIKE MANTIS, COSMO HAS BEEN COMBINK THE SURFACE THOUGHTS OF OUR NEW FRIENDS.
FORGIVE COSMO, BUT YOU ARE SO INTERESTINK.
DID YOU KNOW IT IS STRANGE FACT OF CELESTIAL PATHOLOGY THAT ALL CELESTIALS ARE LINKED BY QUANTUM TELEPATHY?
THEY ARE CONNECTED NO MATTER WHERE OR WHEN THEY ARE.
GOOD FOR THEM. SO...?
TELL THEM, MARTINEX.
TELL THEM HOW THE BADOON ARE KEEPINK THIS BUBBLE OF REALITY OPEN...
IF YOU LOOK OUTSIDE, COSMO, YOU CAN SEE FOR YOURSELF.
THEY CALL IT THE CELESTIAL ENGINE.
THE BADOON ENSLAVED THE LAST OF THE CELESTIALS, AND ENGINEERED THEM INTO A SUPER-CAGE AROUND A POWER SOURCE FORMED FROM EARTH'S DYING SUN.
THE ENGINE IS THE CENTER OF THIS BUBBLE UNIVERSE. THE BADOON USE IT TO GENERATE A MACRO FORCE FIELD THAT HOLDS THE FAULT BACK.

HOW DID THE BADOON ENSLAVE THE D'AST CELESTIALS?
WE THINK THEY HAVE A COSMIC CUBE. THE LAST CUBE.
WHEN THEY GOT THEIR UGLY CLAWS ON IT, IT WAS PRETTY MUCH GAME OVER FOR EVERY OTHER SENTIENT SPECIES IN THE GALAXY.

AND IF WE--TIK!--GET IN THERE?
I THINK I MIGHT BE ABLE TO GET MESSAGE OUT.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IT'S ALL WE'VE GOT. LET'S DO THIS.
THEN ALL WE HAVE ON OUR SIDE IS SURPRISE.
ATTACKING THE CELESTIAL ENGINE IS A SUICIDE MISSION. NO ONE WOULD EVER TRY IT, SO THE BADOON WON'T EXPECT IT.
OF COURSE, IT'LL HELP THAT THE CAPTAIN AMERICA MAKES POINT SIX BEYOND THE SUPERLUMINAL LIMIT SET BY HARKOVIAN PHYSICS.
BUCKLE UP.

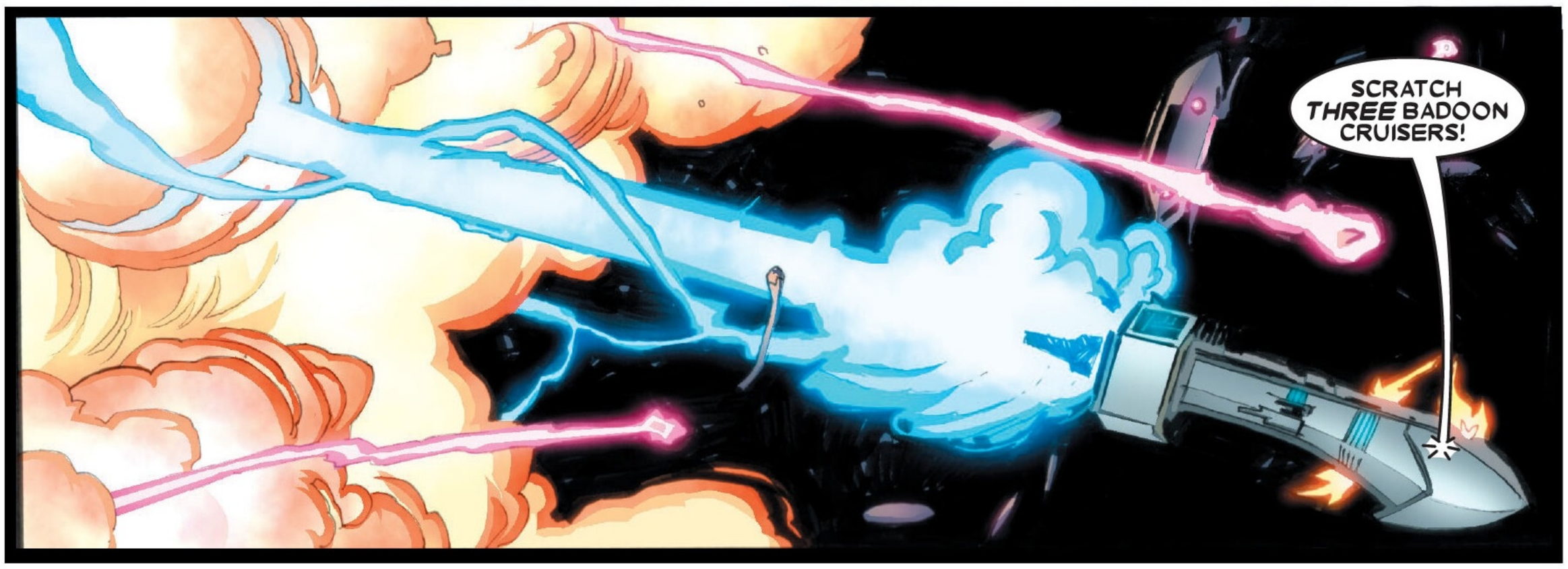
"SUICIDE MISSION"?
ONE WAY. EVEN IF WE GET IN, IT'S BADOON CENTRAL.
AH. YOU OKAY?
THINK YOU BROKE A RIB EARLIER.
YEAH? BUT I THOUGHT--

THAT WAS ALL FIGHTING SMACK TALK.
YOU'RE OKAY, JACK FLAG.

THEY'VE *SCOPED* US. WARSHIPS CLOSING!

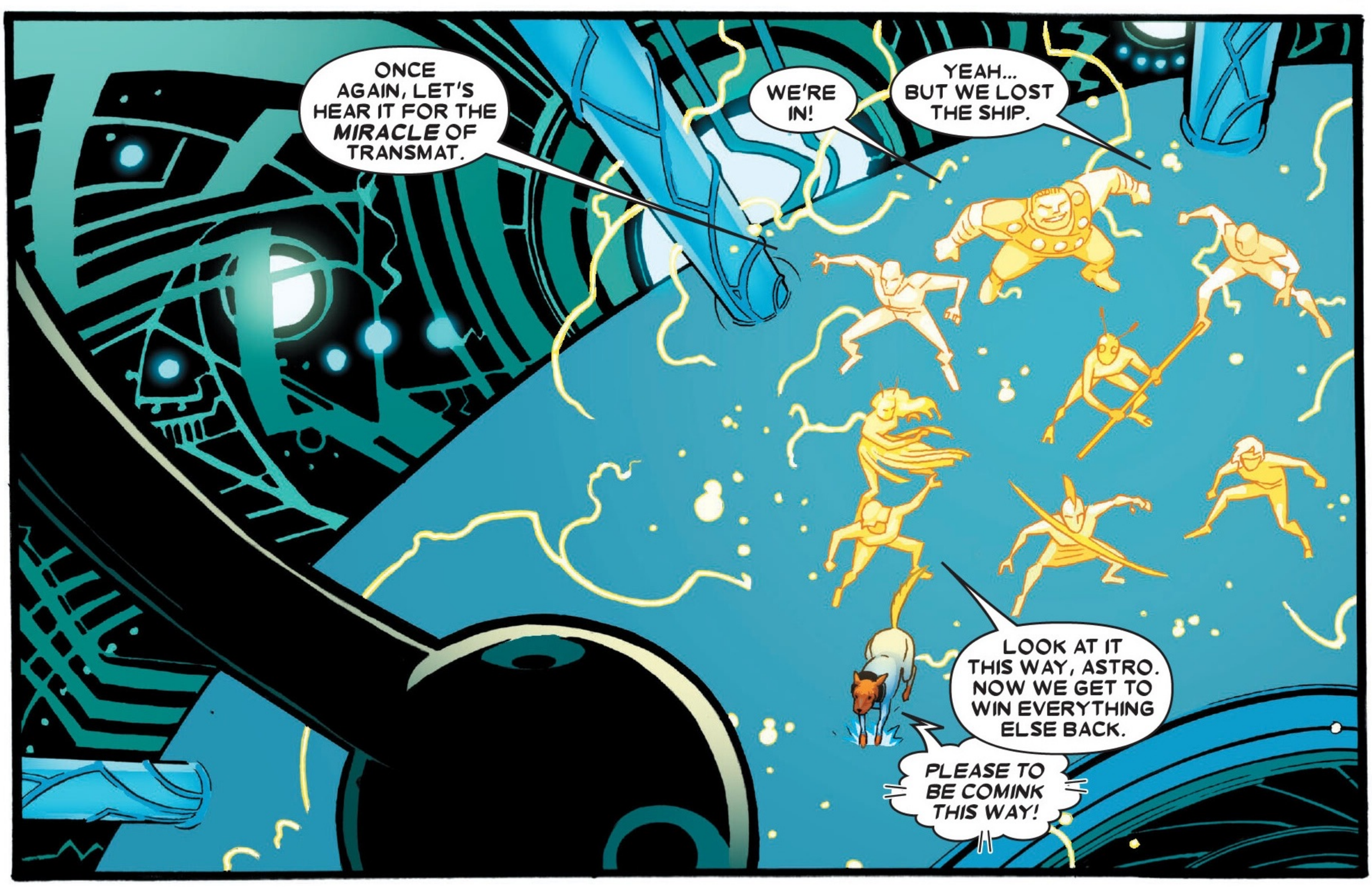
MAX THE SHIELDS!

MARTINEX! MAIN GUN-BANKS *NOW!*



HANG ON!

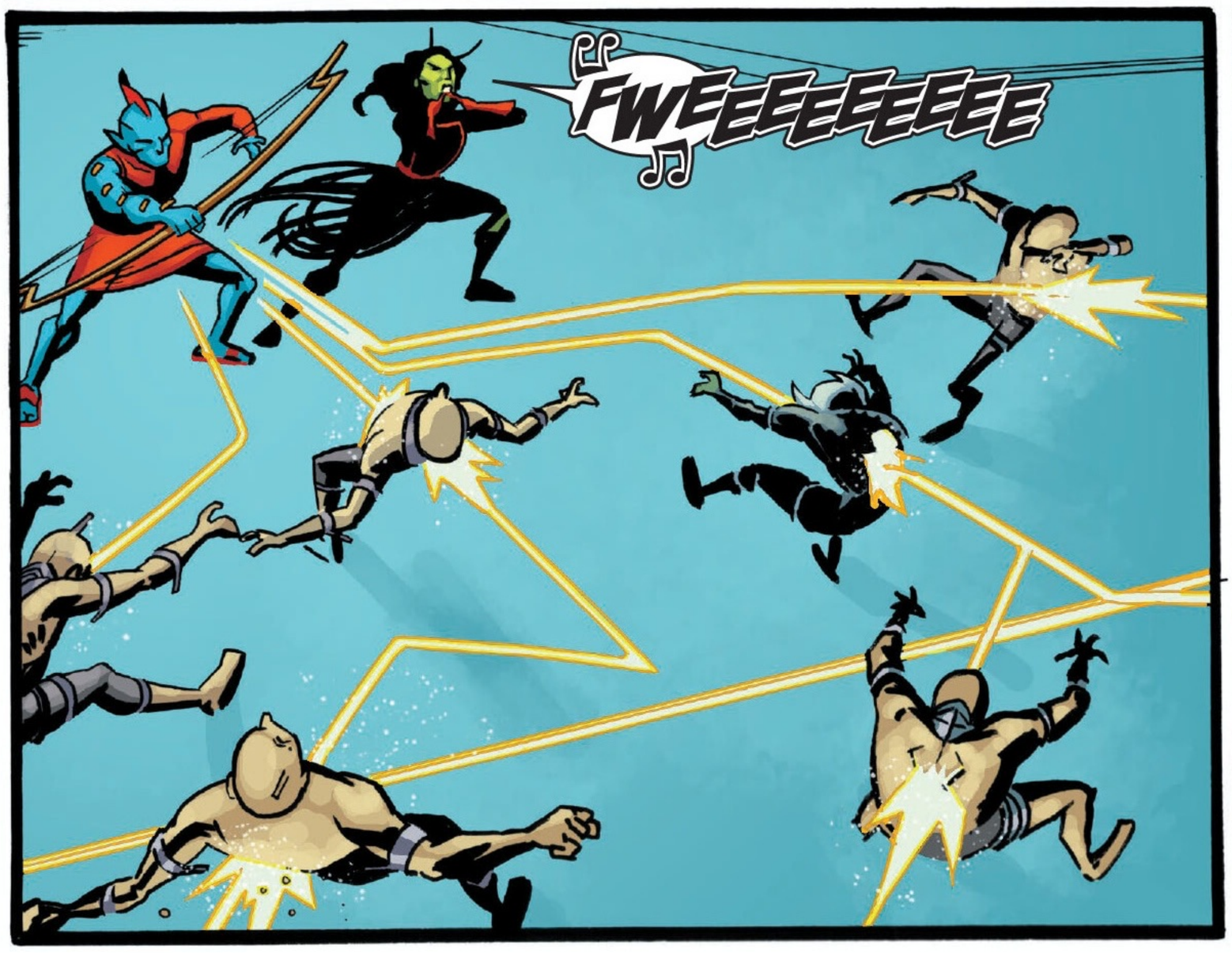
ALMOST THERE!
DAMN! THE SHIELDS ARE SOAKED!
HOLD ON, EVERYBODY, WE--


ONCE AGAIN, LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE MIRACLE OF TRANSMAT.
WE'RE IN!
YEAH... BUT WE LOST THE SHIP.
LOOK AT IT THIS WAY, ASTRO. NOW WE GET TO WIN EVERYTHING ELSE BACK.
PLEASE TO BE COMINK THIS WAY!

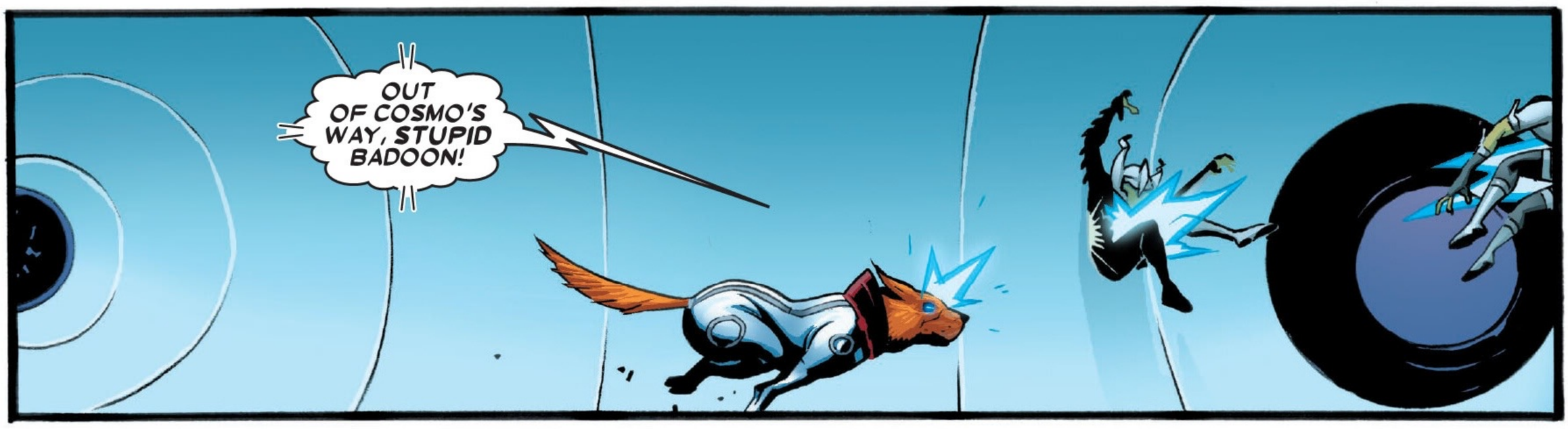
THEY'RE PORTING IN OUT OF THE--TIK!--WOODWORK!
KEEP SLUGGING, BUG-BOY!
HEY! THAT'S--TIK!--MISTER BUG-BOY, IF YOU DON'T MIND!

I'VE BEEN IN SOME LAST STANDS BEFORE, BUT THIS TAKES THE PRIZE!
I WISH I HAD THE TIME TO GET YOU TO JUSTIFY THAT STATEMENT.

READY?
YOU KNOW I KNOW HOW TO WHISTLE, DON'T YOU?
I CAN SONICALLY DIRECT YOUR LIVING ARROWS.


FWEEEEEEEEE

SWEAR TO GOD, I HATE COSMIC STUFF!



HELLO! PRYVET, FRIEND CELESTIAL! KAK PAZHIVAYETE?

ANYWAY, COSMO IS VERY SORRY TO TROUBLE YOU, ESPECIALLY AT THIS DIFFICULT TIME, BUT WE NEED BIG FAVOR.

WE NEED MESSAGE TO BE PASSED ALONK. COSMO HAVE WORDS ALL READY.

MESSAGE BEGINS: "ADAM WARLOCK. HEAR ME. THERE IS LITTLE TIME. THE FATE OF ALL EXISTENCE DEPENDS UPON YOU..."

ARE WE THERE? ARE WE DONE?

COSMO?!

IT IS DONE, COMRADE QUILL! COSMO THINK THE MESSAGE HAS BEEN SENT!

YES! WE DID IT! ASTRO, DID YOU HEAR THAT?

ASTRO? MARTINEX, WHERE DID ASTRO GO?

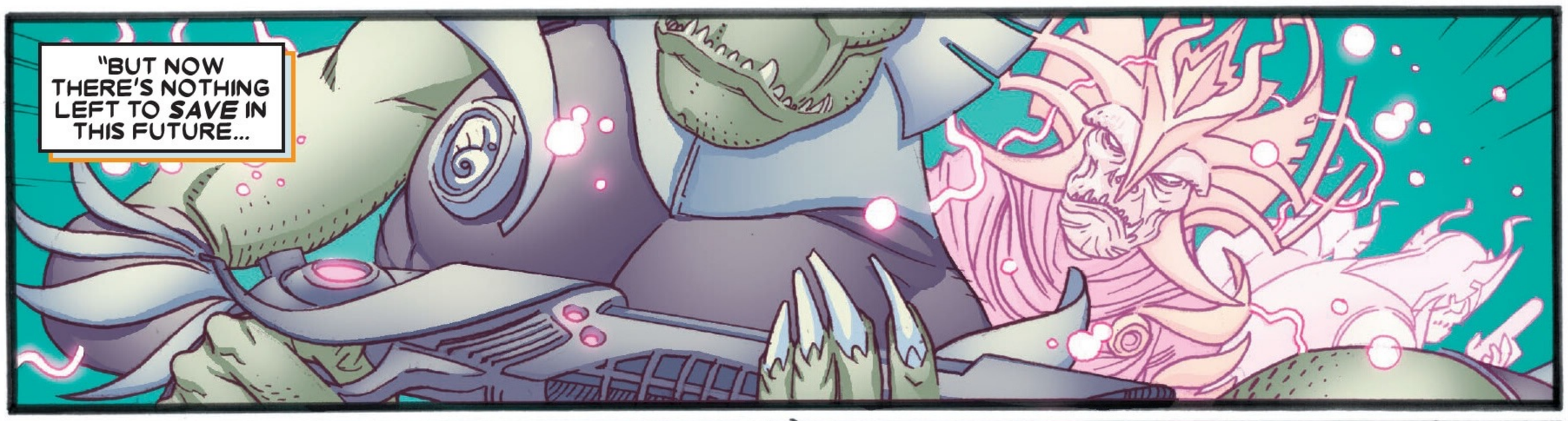
YONDU?

OH, NO.

PETER, IT'S IN ALL THEIR THOUGHTS.

THIS IS THE END FOR THEM, NOW THE MESSAGE IS SENT.

YOU SEE, THERE WAS NO POINT ATTACKING THE CELESTIAL ENGINE BEFORE, BECAUSE TO DO SO WOULD BE TO END THE UNIVERSE.


"BUT NOW THERE'S NOTHING LEFT TO SAVE IN THIS FUTURE...

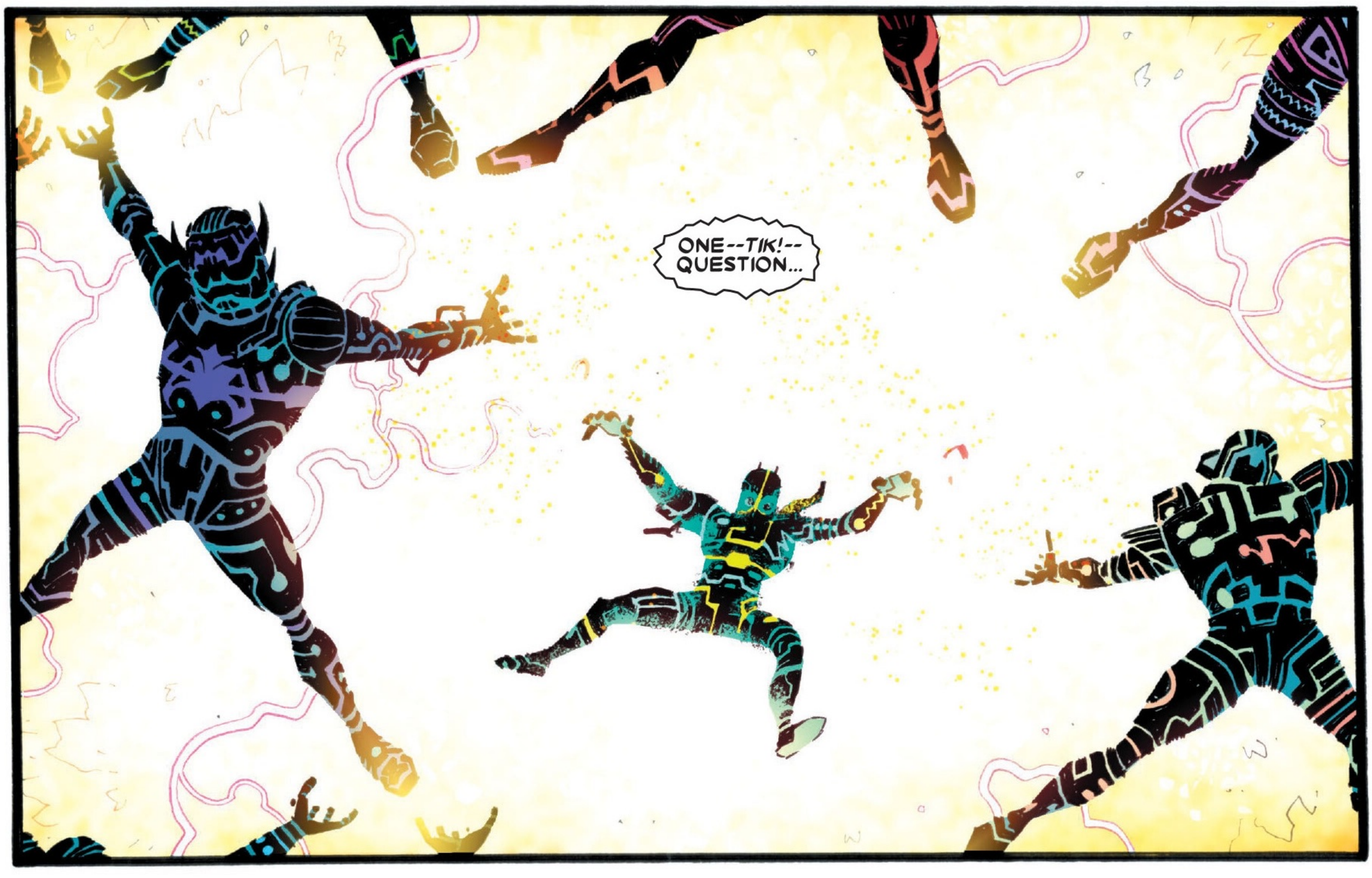
"...AND THE GUARDIANS GET TO SAY A FINAL FAREWELL."

GUESS WHAT, BADOON?

EARTH DID OVERCOME.

HUGE PSYCHOKINETIC BLAST! PETER, IT'S BLOWN THE CELESTIAL OUT OF ALIGNMENT!
WE'RE FALLING BACK INTO THE SUN!
OH, SEE THAT'S NOT A SENTENCE I WANT TO PLAY ANY PART IN!

THE CELESTIAL ENGINE IS COMING APART.
HERE COMES THE END.
GUYS, IT'S BEEN AN HONOR TO COUNT YOU AS FRIENDS.


ONE--TIK!--QUESTION...

....A LITTLE LATE IN THE DAY, I--TIK!-- REALIZE...
...BUT BEFORE WE CREMATE IN THE SUN OR GET CONSUMED BY THE FAULT AS IT RUSHES IN TO CONSUME THE LAST FRAGMENTS OF REALITY, WHICHEVER--TIK!--HAPPENS FIRST...

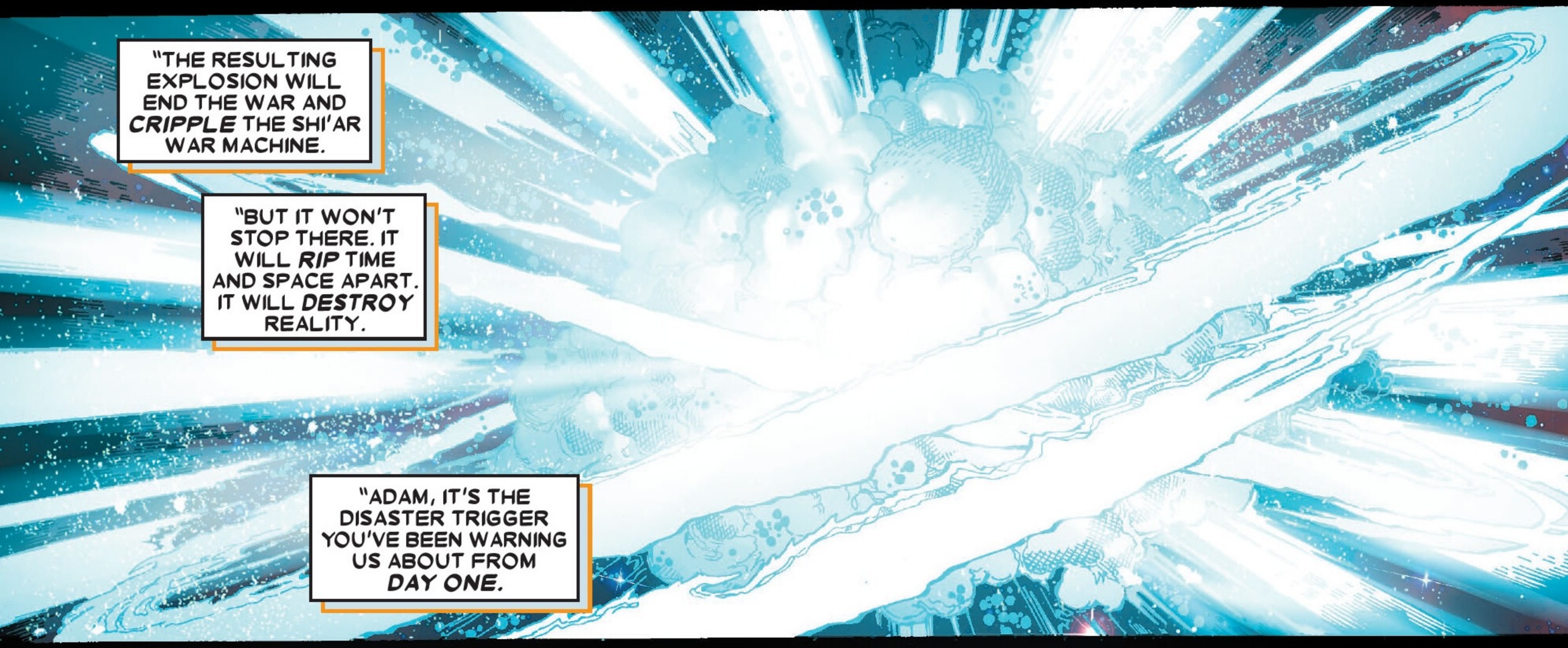
...HOW WILL WE KNOW IF WE SUCCEEDED AND OUR MESSAGE GOT THROUGH?
YOU KNOW, BUG...

...I HAVE NO ID--

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY 17

"ADAM WARLOCK. HEAR ME. THERE IS *LITTLE TIME.* THE FATE OF ALL EXISTENCE DEPENDS UPON YOU.
"THE INHUMANS HAVE A *WEAPON.* THEY CALL IT THE *TERRIGEN-BOMB.*

"I'M SPEAKING TO YOU FROM ABOUT A THOUSAND YEARS IN YOUR *FUTURE,* ADAM, AND I HAVEN'T GOT TIME TO EXPLAIN WHY.
"JUST LISTEN, *OKAY?*
"DESPITE THE BEST EFFORTS OF VULCAN AND THE SHI'AR, THE INHUMANS *WILL* DETONATE THE DEVICE.


"THE RESULTING EXPLOSION WILL END THE WAR AND *CRIPPLE* THE SHI'AR WAR MACHINE.
"BUT IT WON'T STOP THERE. IT WILL *RIP* TIME AND SPACE APART. IT WILL *DESTROY* REALITY.
"ADAM, IT'S THE DISASTER TRIGGER YOU'VE BEEN WARNING US ABOUT FROM *DAY ONE.*

"THE T-BOMB WILL KICK OFF A PROGRESSIVE COSMOLOGICAL COLLAPSE CALLED *THE FAULT.*
"IT WILL ENGULF OUR *UNIVERSE.*
"SO WHAT I'M SAYING IS, YOU'VE GOT TO *STOP* BLACK BOLT. YOU'VE GOT TO *STOP* THE DETONATION. *FAST.*
"OKAY, SIGNING OFF. YOUR FRIEND, PETER."

KNOWHERE.

WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

GUARDIANS CONTROL CENTER.

WELL, THE GIANT ROBOT HEAD WE LIVE IN JUST CAME TO LIFE AND DELIVERED A PERSONAL MESSAGE TO *GERARD WAY* OVER THERE.

YOU CAN'T SAY THIS JOB DOESN'T KEEP YOU ON YOUR TOES.

MOON-DRAGON, THIS SOME KINDA TRICK?

NO, DRAX, I CAN *AUTHENTICATE* IT. IT WAS A *QUANTUM TELEPATHIC MESSAGE* COMMUNICATED TO THIS CELESTIAL FROM ANOTHER OF ITS KIND FROM THE *FUTURE.*

THE TELEPATHIC TYPOFORM IDENTIFIES THE MIND OF ORIGIN AS *PETER QUILL'S.*

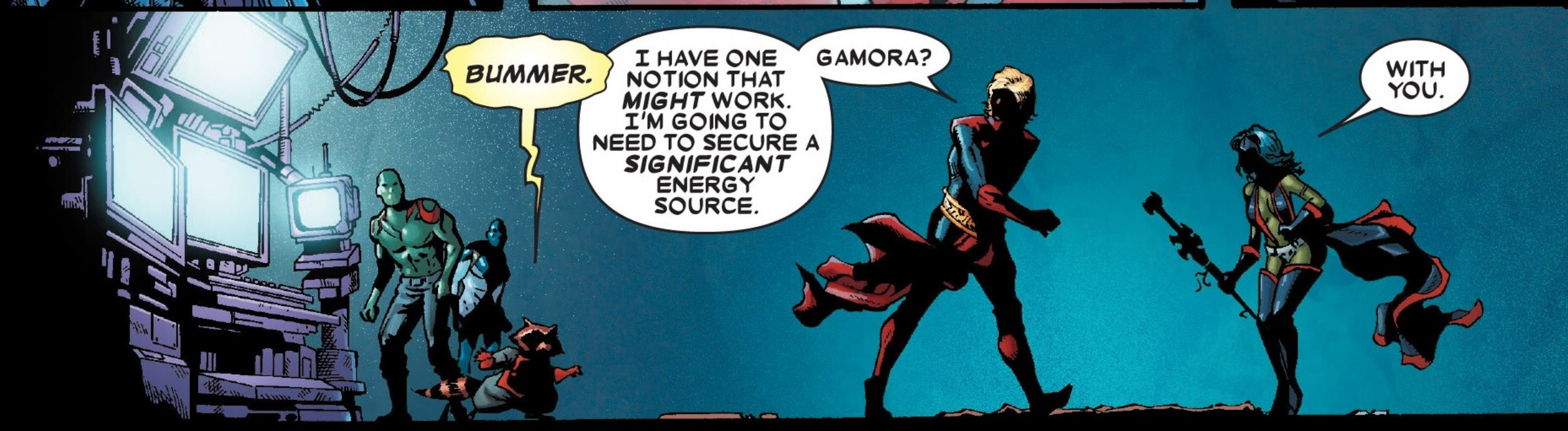
MARTYR, I SUPPOSE THE *SIMPLE* ANSWER TO *"HOW THE HELL IS STAR-LORD TALKING TO US FROM THE FUTURE,"* HAS GOT TO BE *STARHAWK.*

IT CERTAINLY EXPLAINS WHY THEIR HALF OF THE TEAM HAS *VANISHED.*

ADAM, THIS IS YOUR PLAY ENTIRELY. CALL THE BALL. WHAT DO WE DO?
IT'S TOO LATE, ROCKET.
HUH?

PETER'S MESSAGE HAS COME TOO LATE.
LOOK AT THE MONITOR. WE'RE READING A GIGANTIC DETONATION ON THE KREE-SHI'AR BORDER.
D'AST!
WARLOCK'S RIGHT. SOMETHING'S BLOWN A HOLE IN TIME AND SPACE THAT'S LIGHT-YEARS ACROSS.

LIKE THE FISSURES WE'VE CLOSED BEFORE?
YES, MAJOR VICTORY, BUT FAR MORE MASSIVE. AND GROWING.
THE MESSAGE SAID "PROGRESSIVE." THIS FAULT IS EXPANDING, AND IT WILL KEEP EXPANDING UNTIL IT HAS SWALLOWED THE UNIVERSE.


BUMMER.
I HAVE ONE NOTION THAT MIGHT WORK. I'M GOING TO NEED TO SECURE A SIGNIFICANT ENERGY SOURCE.
GAMORA?
WITH YOU.

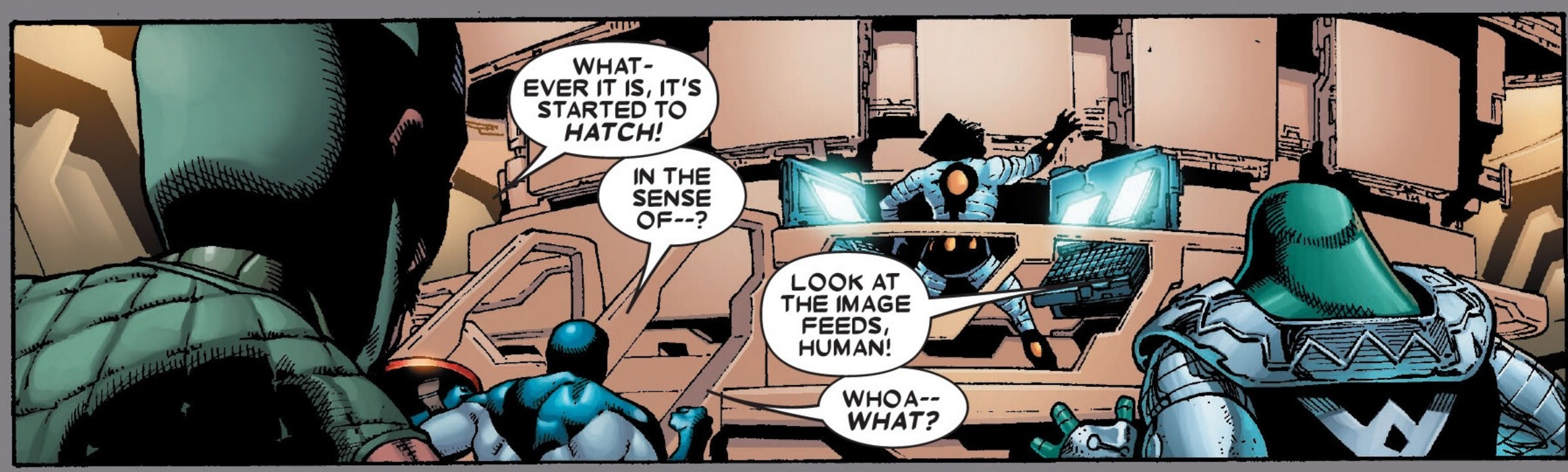
SO WHAT DO WE DO? PRESS DAMP TOWELS AGAINST THE BOTTOMS OF DOORS? STOCKPILE DRIED GOODS?
GO TO ATTILAN.
WHY?
WELL, THIS FAULT WAS CAUSED BY AN INHUMAN SUPER-WEAPON.
WE SHOULD MAKE SURE THEY DON'T HAVE ANOTHER.

ATTILAN.
I HATE TO BE THE BEARER OF BAD TIDINGS...
...BUT THIS SITUATION IS NOW OFFICIALLY DREADFUL.
THE TIME-SPACE FISSURE IS SPREADING EXPONENTIALLY.
AT CURRENT VELOCITY, ATTILAN WILL BE ENGULFED IN TWENTY-TWO MINUTES.
KARNAK, CAN'T WE BOOST THE CITY'S DRIVER ENGINES?
NO, GORGON. THE GRAVITY CHAMBERS ARE ALREADY AT FULL COMPRESSION.
MEDUSA?
I HAVE NOTHING LEFT, SISTER. I DO NOT KNOW WHAT TO SAY.
WELL, I DO.
IT STARTS OFF WITH "ARE YOU INHUMANS ENTIRELY OUT OF YOUR GOURDS?"
AND IT ENDS WITH "WE TOLD YOU SO, TOLD YOU SO, TOLD YOU SO!"

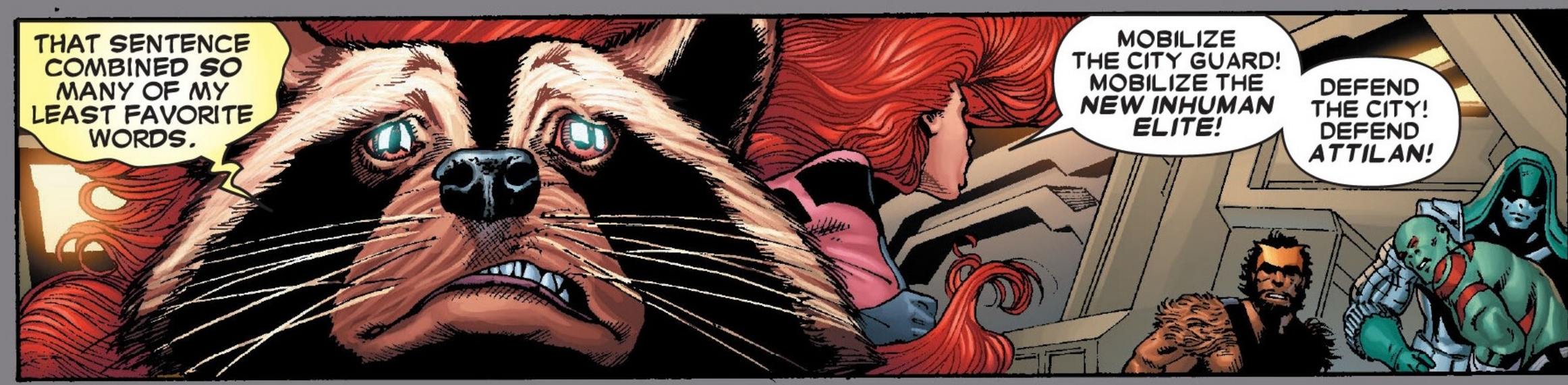
INTRUDERS! I--
UWULPP!
I AM GROOT.
UH UH UH.
WE'RE THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY. HI. YOU MIGHT REMEMBER THE NAME.
MY BUDDY STAR-LORD BROUGHT A BUNCH OF US HERE RECENTLY.
WE REMEMBER.
WE WARNED YOU. WE WARNED YOU THAT THE FABRIC OF THE GALAXY COULD NOT TAKE THIS WAR.
AS I RECALL, YOU ALSO PUT A BLADE TO MY THROAT WHEN I TRIED TO MEDIATE.
SO WHAT IS THIS? HAVE YOU COME TO CHASTISE US? RUB OUT NOSES IN IT?
YOU KNOW, CRYSTAL, THAT MIGHT NOT BE SUCH A BAD WAY OF SPENDING THE LAST FEW MINUTES OF COSMIC EXISTENCE.

GET OUT.
I HAVE NO INTENTION OF LISTENING TO YOUR SELF-RIGHTEOUS SERMONS. MY HUSBAND IS DEAD.
DEAD?
BLACK BOLT PERISHED IN THE DETONATION.
WELL, BOOHOO.
THOOM
HOW DARE YOU! HOW DARE YOU!
EVERBODY STOP IT! WE'VE GOT MORE URGENT THINGS TO CONCERN US!
LIKE WHAT?

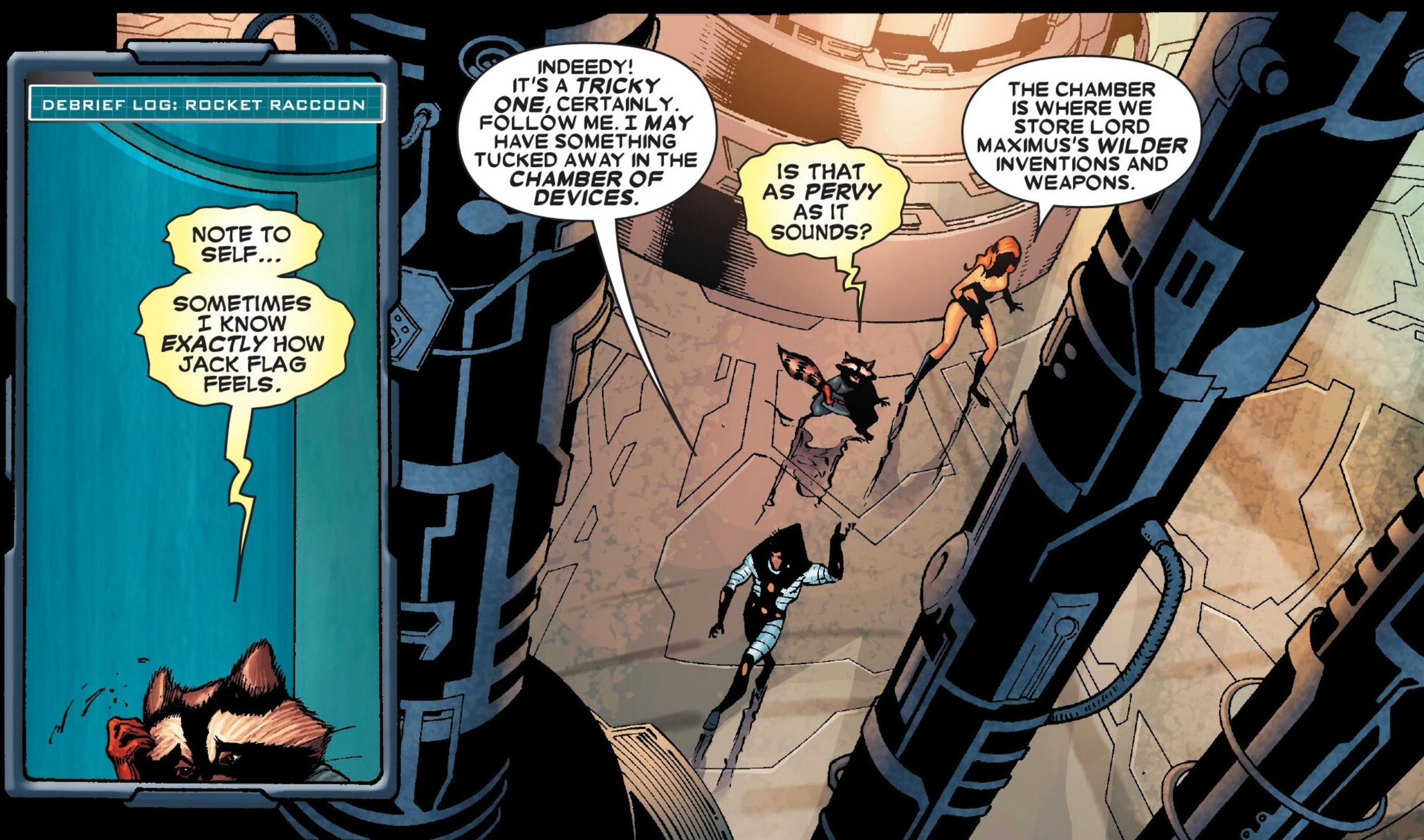
"WELL... ASK A STUPID QUESTION."
DEBRIEF LOG: ROCKET RACCOON (EVOLVED MAMMAL, TACTICAL AND DEMOLITIONS EXPERTISE)
WE'D SEEN CRAZY FLARK COME OUT OF FISSURES BEFORE, OF *COURSE* WE HAD.
JUST NEVER SOMETHING THAT *BIG*. I GUESS IT WAS BECAUSE WE'D NEVER SEEN A *FISSURE* THAT BIG EITHER.
IT WAS DRAGGING THE WHOLE *CITY* BACK INTO THE FAULT.
THEN IT STARTED TO *HATCH*.



"IT'S SPAWNING *ORGANISMS* FROM *PUSTULES* ON ITS *TENTACLES!*"



YOU'RE LIKE MISTER BRAINBOX, RIGHT, MAXIMUS? MISTER GENIUS CLEVER-TROUSERS?
SO HOW DO WE GET A FIFTY-ZILLION TON INTER-DIMENSIONAL SPACE-SQUID TO LET GO OF A SELF-PROPELLED INTERSTELLAR CITY?


DEBRIEF LOG: ROCKET RACCOON
NOTE TO SELF...
SOMETIMES I KNOW EXACTLY HOW JACK FLAG FEELS.
INDEEDY! IT'S A TRICKY ONE, CERTAINLY. FOLLOW ME. I MAY HAVE SOMETHING TUCKED AWAY IN THE CHAMBER OF DEVICES.
IS THAT AS PERVY AS IT SOUNDS?
THE CHAMBER IS WHERE WE STORE LORD MAXIMUS'S WILDER INVENTIONS AND WEAPONS.

I SUPPOSE WE COULD TRY--
I AM GROOT.
GROOT? OLD BUDDY, I THOUGHT YOU'D GONE WITH THE OTHERS.
GOODNESS! MY LIEGE, THAT'S AN EXTRAORDINARILY GOOD IDEA!

HUH? WHAT IS?
I AM GROOT.
OF COURSE, OF COURSE! AND THUS INITIATING A FORM OF RELATIVISTIC FEEDBACK!
I AM GROOT!
OH, SIRE! QUANTUM INHIBITORS TOO? THAT LAST TOUCH IS NOTHING SHORT OF GENIUS!

THE TREE MAN IS JUST SAYING "I AM GROOT" OVER AND OVER, RIGHT?
MAXIMUS IS AS CRAZY AS A BAG OF SPANNERS, ISN'T HE?
YOU SHOULD BOTH BE ASHAMED OF YOUR PREJUDICES! HIS HIGHNESS KING GROOT IS ROYALTY! HE COMES FROM AN ANCIENT AND ENNOBLED SAP-LINE!
AS BEFITS THE SCION OF AN ELITE ROYAL HOUSE, HE HAS RECEIVED THE FINEST EDUCATION FROM THE MOST GIFTED TUTORS!
HIS GRASP OF QUASI-DIMENSIONAL SUPERPOSITIONAL ENGINEERING ALONE IS BREATHTAKING!
IT IS?
BUT HE'S JUST SAYING "I AM GROOT."
DEAR CRYSTAL! THE MATURE DENDRITIC FORM OF KING GROOT'S PEOPLE IS ROBUST AND HEAVYWEIGHT. OFTEN, THE ORGANS OF ACOUSTIC GENERATION BECOME STIFF AND INFLEXIBLE.
IT MAY SOUND AS IF HE IS SIMPLY REPEATING HIS NAME, BUT THAT IS SIMPLY DUE TO THE HARDENED FORMATION OF HIS LARYNX.
YOU MUST LISTEN TO THE SIGH OF BREEZE BENEATH IT. THE NUANCE OF MEANING.
MY LORD, YOU WERE SAYING?
I AM GROOT!
NOW THAT IS BRILLIANT! AND ALL WE'D NEED IS A SOCKET SET AND A VERY LONG PIECE OF STRING!
LORD MAXIMUS IS AS CRAZY AS A BAG OF SPANNERS.
HEY, IF THIS WORKS, YOU AND ME ARE GOING TO BE REALLY EMBARRASSED.

ATTILAN'S OUTER WALLS.

MORE OF THEM!

THEY'RE POURING IN!

ROCKET?! YOU ANY CLOSER TO THAT BIG SAVE?

THE CHAMBER OF DEVICES.

DRAX BABY, I HAVE TEAMS OF TRAINED EXPERTS WORKING ON IT RIGHT NOW.

I AM GROOT.

SO REVERSE POLARITY?

I AM GROOT.

OH, I AGREE. ECHOTECH BATTERIES AS A SHUNT ENERGIZER, NO QUESTION ABOUT IT.

DEBRIEF LOG: ROCKET RACCOON

MAX AND GROOT, THEY RIGGED SOMETHING UP.

DON'T ASK ME WHAT. IT MAY HAVE ALL BEEN IN MAX'S HEAD.

HE CALLED IT A RELATAVISTIC FEEDBACK LOOP. HE PULLED THE LEVER AND, WELL...

OH NICE.
THEY'RE JUST DECAYING! DISSOLVING!
THE CITY IS PULLING FREE!
BECAUSE OUR FEEDBACK LOOP HAS UNMADE THE CREATURES, YOU SEE?
IT UNCREATED THEIR REALITY AND REIMPOSED OURS!
YEAH, THAT WON'T SOUND SO IMPRESSIVE TO PEOPLE WHO'VE JUST BEEN GLOOPED ON.
MEDUSA'S GONNA NEED A TRUCK-LOAD OF L'OREAL ALL BY HERSELF.
WE'RE STILL NOT OUT OF THE WOODS.
THAT THING DECELERATED US. ATTILAN IS FALLING BACK INTO THE FAULT.
AND WHAT... WHAT IS THAT?

IT'S A FLEET OF TEMPLESHIPS FROM THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH OF TRUTH!
ROCKET? I DON'T LIKE THIS!
THE CHURCH IS NEVER ANYTHING EXCEPT BAD NEWS! I'M GOING TO SCOPE THIS OUT!
I CAN SEE PEOPLE, ROCKY! I CAN SEE A HOST OF THEIR D'AST CARDINALS, INCLUDING RAKER HIMSELF!
HOLY PAMA! ADAM'S WITH THEM!
OKAY, BUT STAY IN CONTACT, PHYLA!
ABSOLUTELY!
ADAM?
ADAM? WHAT THE HECK IS THIS?
I'M AFRAID ADAM WARLOCK CAN'T COME TO THE KNOWN RIGHT NOW, PHYLA-VELL.

DO YOU NEED ME TO *REMOVE* THIS BOTHERSOME UNBELIEVER, LORD?

HE CAN'T HEAR YOU...BUT THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY, CARDINAL RAKER.

ADAM'S ENCASED IN A...*SPELL BUBBLE?*

ADAM WARLOCK IS DESIGNING THE MOST *COMPLEX* AND *LARGE-SCALE* ENCHANTMENT OF HIS CAREER. IT COMPRISES OVER FIFTEEN *MILLION* INDIVIDUALLY AND SKILLFULLY CONJURENEERED *PSI-LLABLES.*

IMPRESSIVE. WHAT'S THE *U.C.T.* DOING HERE, GAM?

THE SPELL WILL NOT WORK UNLESS IT IS SUFFICIENTLY *ENERGIZED.*

THE FAITH GENERATORS OF THE TEMPLESHIPS, POWERED BY *MILLIONS* OF BELIEVERS, WILL SUPPLY THE NECESSARY ENERGY RESERVOIR.

BUT THE CHURCH IS *REPUGNANT.* WE ALL KNOW THAT. ITS FAITH GENERATORS *CONSUME* LIVING SOULS.

ADAM SAYS THAT SOMETIMES, WE MUST *GRADE* OUR ENEMIES, PHYLA. THE CHURCH IS BAD, BUT THE FAULT IS *WORSE.*

THE LESSER MAY *YET* COMBAT THE GREATER.

HOW DOES THIS SPELL WORK?

TIME AND SPACE HAVE *TORN LOOSE.* OUR PRESENT TIMELINE IS LITERALLY *FLAPPING AROUND,* UNANCHORED.

ADAM INTENDS TO GRAFT IT ONTO AN *INERT* TIMESTREAM. HE WANTS TO ATTACH OUR PRESENT TO A STABLE, *QUIESCENT* FUTURE AND MAKE IT SECURE.

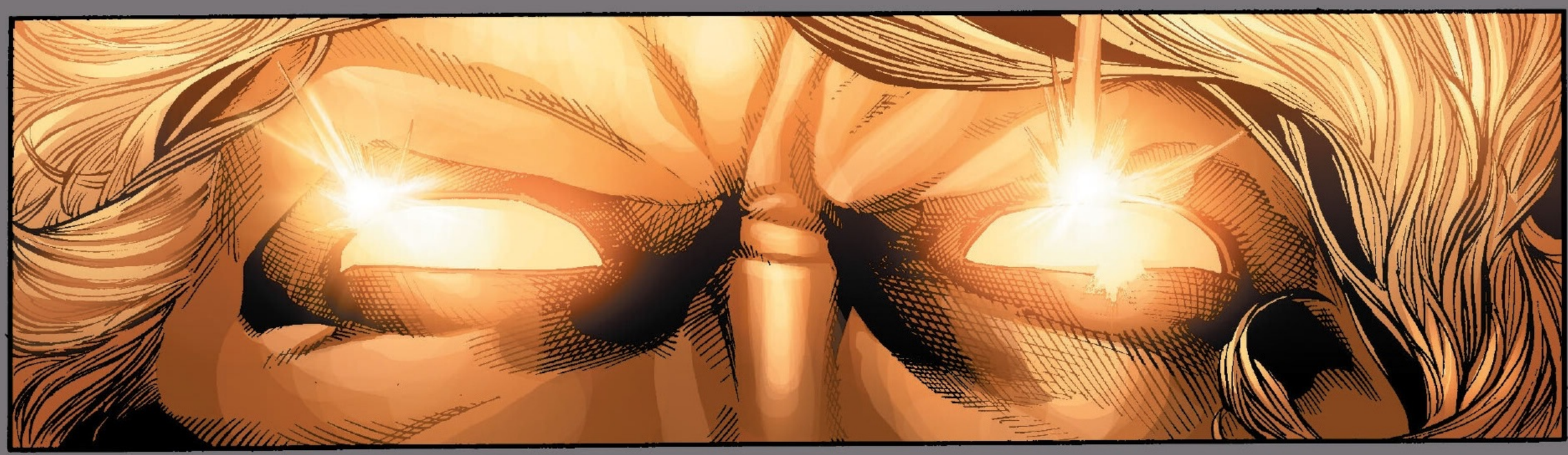
THAT SHOULD *ARREST* THE FAULT'S EXPANSION.

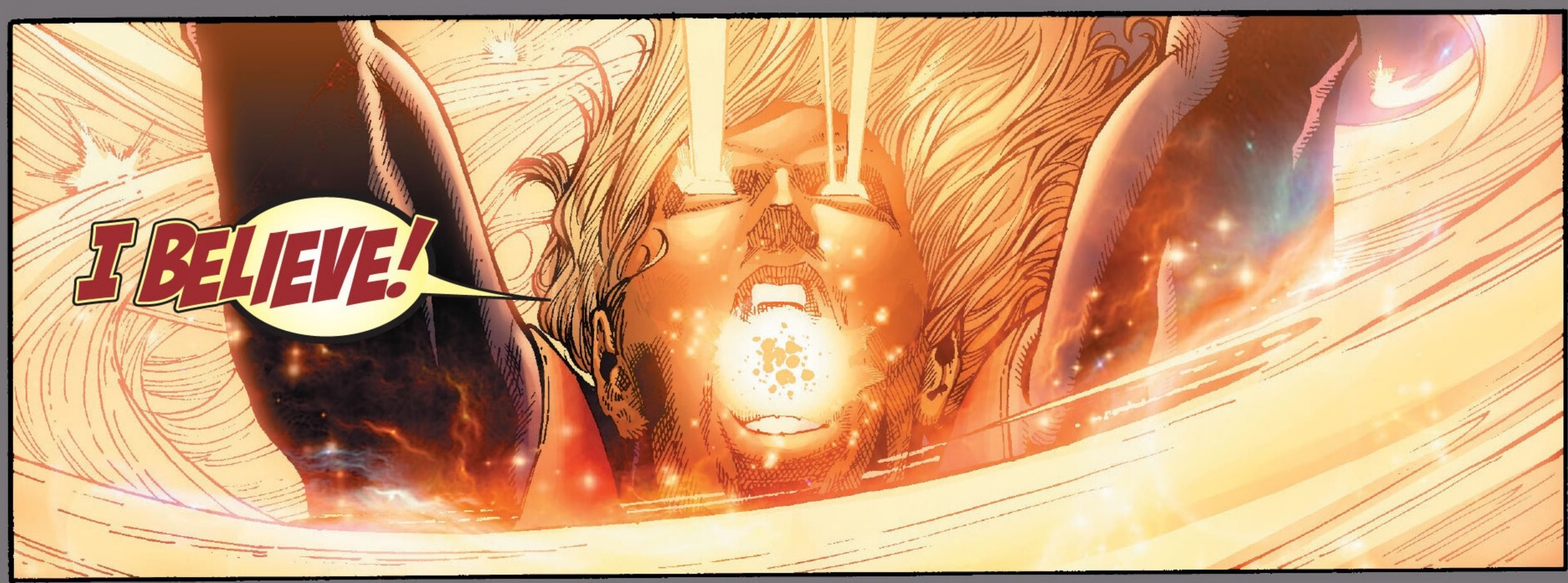
YOU MEAN HE WANTS TO CONNECT OUR PRESENT TO *WHAT?* AN *UNUSED* FUTURE?

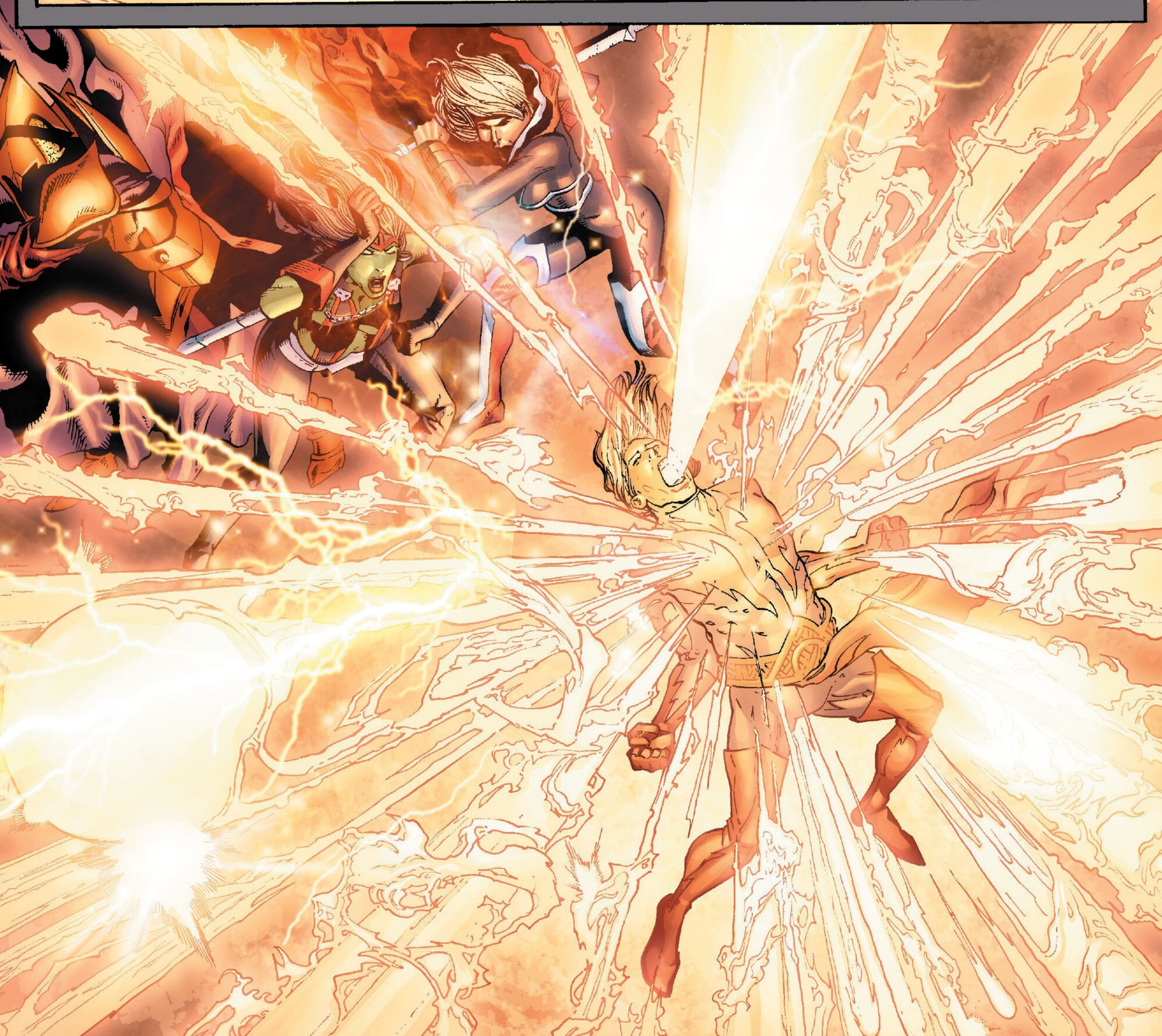
YES.

WHERE THE FLARK DO YOU FIND ONE OF *THOSE?*

FUNNILY ENOUGH, ADAM SAYS HE KNOWS OF ONE. IT'S A DESPERATE, *RECKLESS* GAMBLE, BUT IT MIGHT WORK.




I BELIEVE!



ATTILAN.

TALK TO ME, MAX.

THE FAULT'S EXPANSION HAS *CEASED.*

GREAT RANDAC, IT'S *CEASED!*

I THINK I MIGHT CRY.

ADAM? THIS IS ROCKET! YOU'VE DONE A *MAN'S* JOB, SIR, A MAN'S JOB...

...WE'RE ALL DELIGHTED HERE, AND I'M SPEAKING FOR THE WHOLE UNIVERSE!

SERIOUSLY, ADAM? YOU THERE, PAL?

I HEAR YOU, ROCKET.

WOW, THAT WAS *CLOSE.* I WASN'T *SURE* I COULD HALT IT.

I'VE LOCKED IT AND STOPPED IT FROM *EXPANDING*, BUT IT'S *STILL* OPEN, ROCKET.

THE FAULT'S *PARSECS* WIDE. IT'S A *HUGE* DIMENSIONAL GATEWAY. THE PROBLEMS IT REPRESENTS DON'T BEAR *THINKING* ABOUT.

WE'LL *CROSS THOSE BRIDGES, ADAM! FOR NOW, BUDDY...*

...YOU'VE SAVED THE UNIVERSE! HOW OFTEN DOES A GUY GET THE BRAGGING RIGHTS TO THAT?

UHK.

SKLURK

ADAM?!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE? PHYLA, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!
I DID WHAT I HAD TO DO. TO GET MOONDRAGON BACK, I MADE A PACT WITH OBLIVION.
HE TOLD ME I HAD TO KILL THE AVATAR OF LIFE, AND THAT I'D KNOW WHAT TO DO WHEN THE MOMENT AROSE.
I'M SORRY, OKAY?
YOU'RE SORRY?
YOU'RE SORRY?!
YOU DO REALIZE I'M GOING TO KILL YOU NASTY FOR THIS!
BRING IT.

PHYLA? WHAT'S GOING ON OUT THERE? PHYLA?! ADAM?!
RESPOND!
SHK

ADAM! ADAM!
ADAM?
OH, ADAM. STAY WITH ME. I CAN GET YOU HELP.
THANKS, DARLING, BUT I DON'T NEED ANY.
ADAM?
I'M FINE. SERIOUSLY. SUPER-DOOPER.
OH MY GO--NNHHH! GAAHHK!
YOU REMEMBER ME, EVEN THOUGH I HAVEN'T HAPPENED YET.
HOW SWEET!

THIS WAS THE TIMELINE! THIS WAS THE "QUIESCENT" FUTURE YOU USED!
OH, WARLOCK! YOU IDIOT! YOU SAVED THE UNIVERSE BUT YOU LOST YOURSELF!
THIS IS THE FUTURE YOU ABORTED! THIS IS THE FUTURE WHERE YOU BECAME THE MA--GHHH!
HUSH.
KRRYKK
AND BEGONE.
THERE'S ALWAYS A PRICE TO PAY.
FOR EVERYTHING.

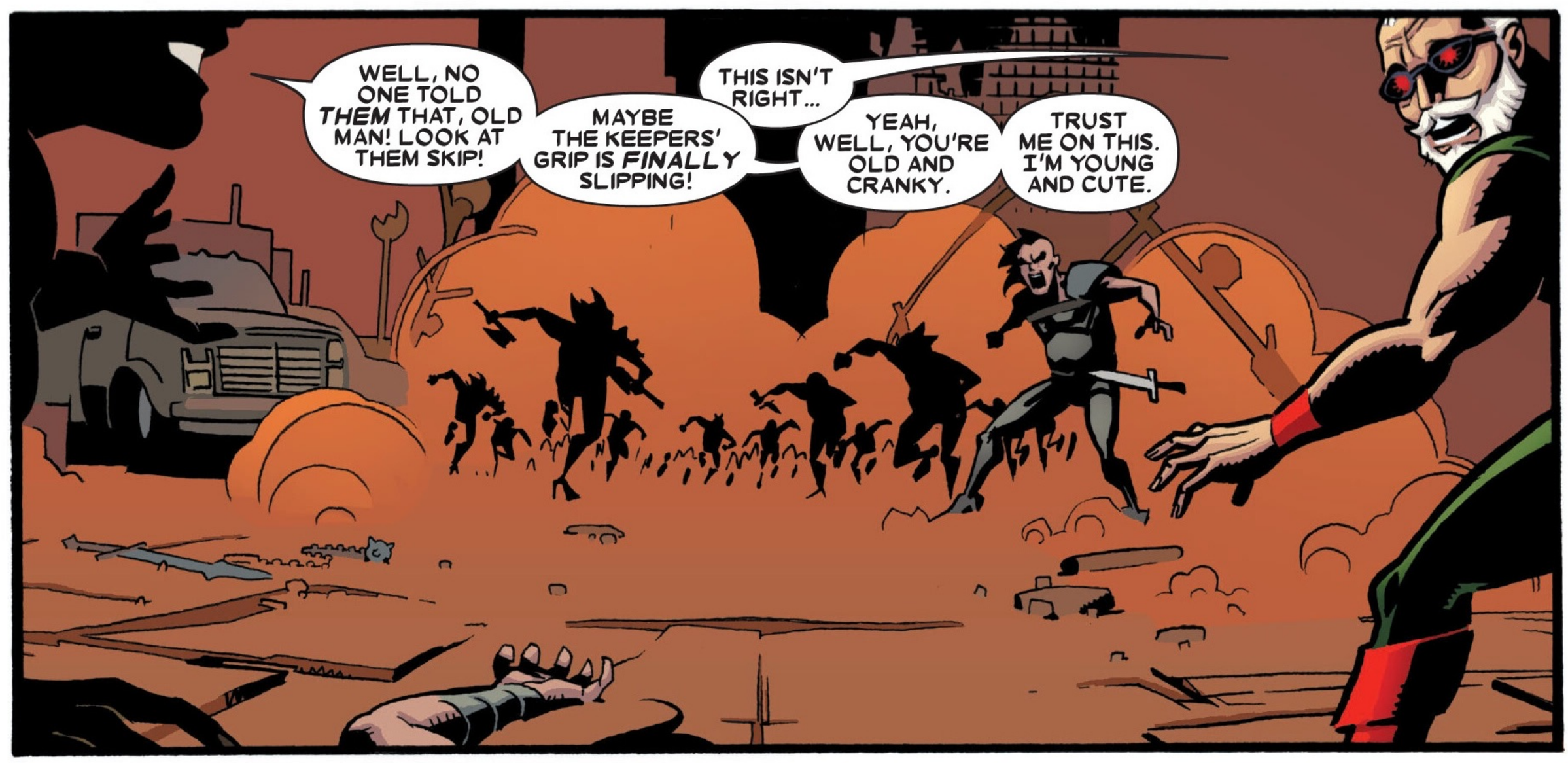
ADAM MAGUS

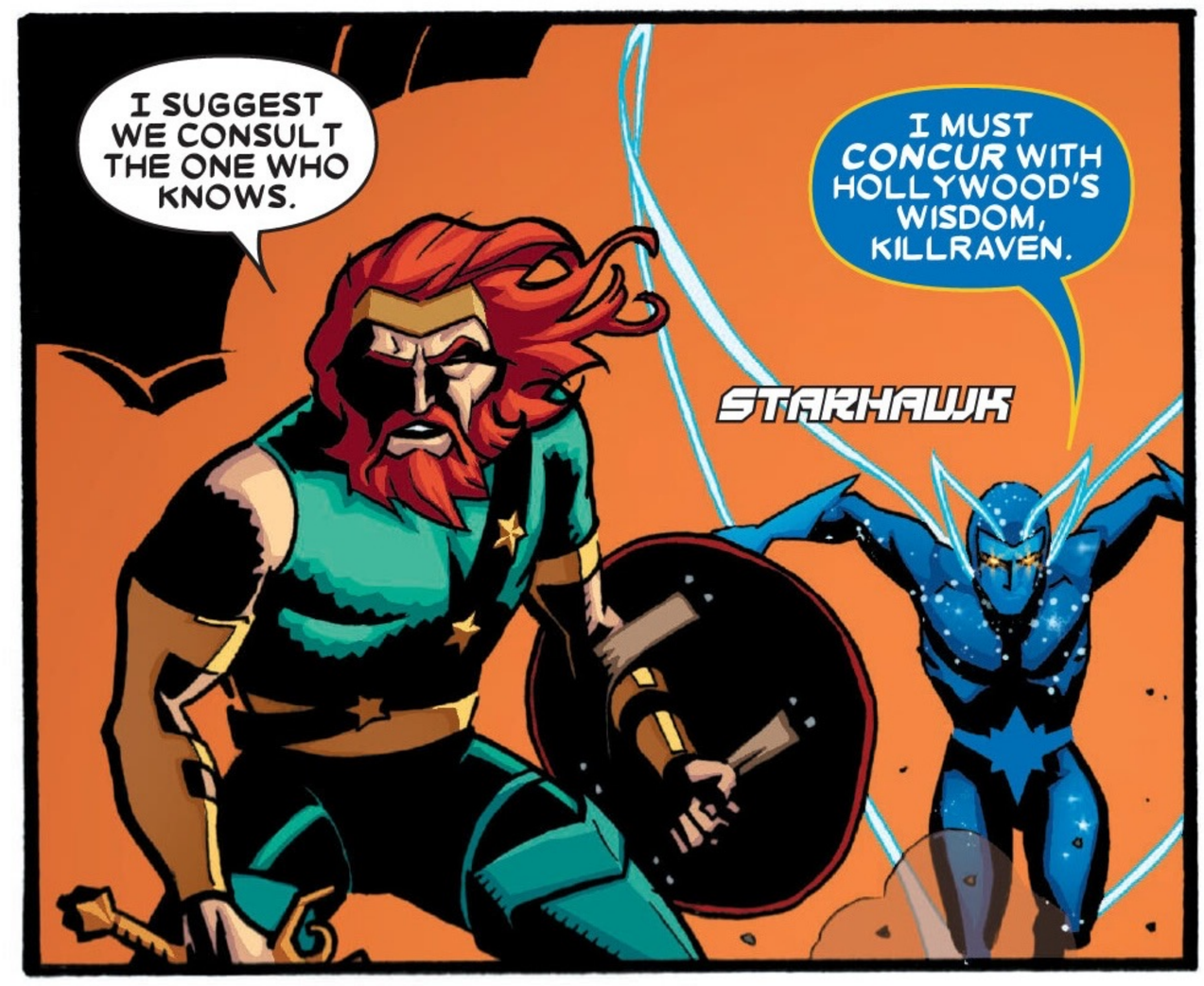
GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY 18

STEEL UPON STEEL: THE SOUND OF HUMAN SUFFERING IN THESE BATTLE-SCARRED CITY STREETS.
STEEL UPON STEEL: THE CLASH OF BRAVE MEN FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL UNDER THE HEEL OF AN ALIEN OPPRESSOR.
STEEL UPON STEEL: THE WAR CRY OF THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY AND THEIR LEADER, THE CRIMSON-HAIRED DEMON NAMED
KILLRAVEN
FOR THE FREEMEN, GUARDIANS! SHOW THEM NO QUARTER!
FRIDAY THE 13TH JANUARY, 3009.

NEW YORK.
I HEAR THAT, 'RAVEN!
LET'S BREAK THROUGH THESE LAB-RATS AND SECURE THOSE TRAILERS!
LAB-RATS. THE "LAB" PART OF THE NICKNAME IS A COMPRESSION OF THE WORD COLLABORATOR.
CHARLIE-27

THE PURPOSE OF TODAY'S RAID: TO CAPTURE A CONVOY OF SUPPLIES DESPERATELY NEEDED BY THE OPPRESSED FREEMEN WHO LIVE IN THE RUBBLE.
HEY, IS IT ME, OR DOES IT FEEL LIKE THESE RATS ARE ABOUT TO TURN TAIL AND RUN?
BUT THEY CAN'T.
LAB-RATS ALWAYS FIGHT TO THE LAST. THE BRAIN-GOAD IMPLANTS DON'T PERMIT THEM TO RETREAT.
NIKKI
HOLLYWOOD


WELL, NO ONE TOLD THEM THAT, OLD MAN! LOOK AT THEM SKIP!
MAYBE THE KEEPERS' GRIP IS FINALLY SLIPPING!
THIS ISN'T RIGHT...
YEAH, WELL, YOU'RE OLD AND CRANKY.
TRUST ME ON THIS. I'M YOUNG AND CUTE.


I SUGGEST WE CONSULT THE ONE WHO KNOWS.
I MUST CONCUR WITH HOLLYWOOD'S WISDOM, KILLRAVEN.
STARHAWK

LAB-RATS DO NOT FALL BACK WITHOUT EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION, AND THE KEEPERS WOULD NOT LEAVE AN APPROACH TO THEIR MAIN COMMAND NODE UNGUARDED.
SOMETHING IS WRONG HERE.

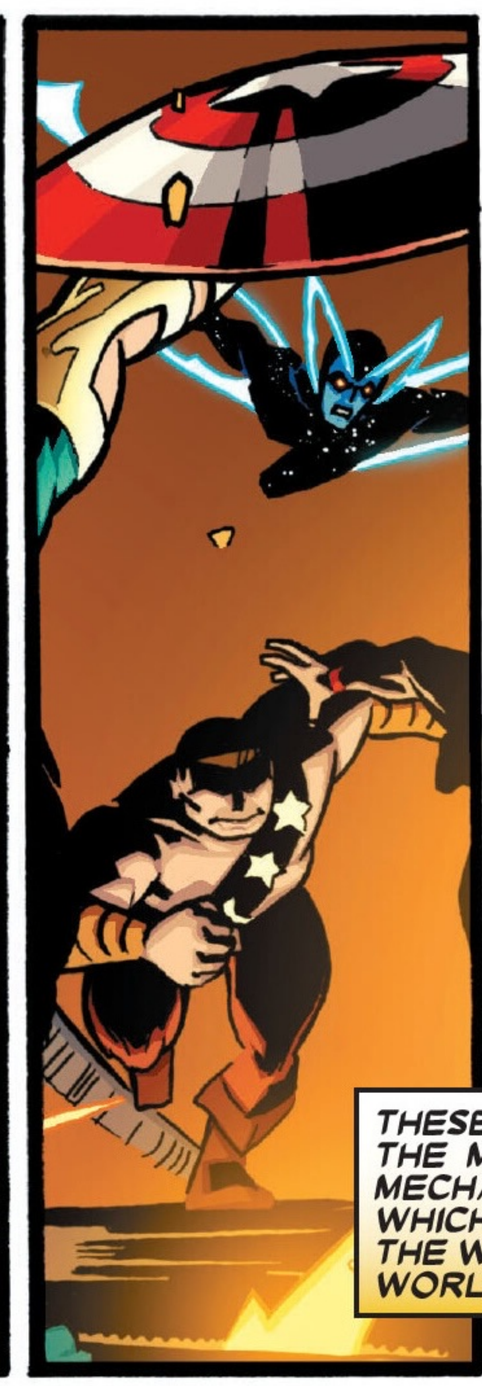
I CAN FEEL IT. THE BURNING SUN. THE AIRLESS HUSH. NOTHING STIRRING.
IT IS AS IF TIME *ITSELF* HAS PAUSED.
IT IS AS IF THE WORLD IS HOLDING ITS BREATH AND--
THTOOM

THTOOM THTOOM THTOOM
IT CAN'T BE...
GOOD GOD! NO!

TRIPODS! MOVE!

THE INFAMOUS TRIPOD WAR MACHINES WERE THE KEEPERS' INVASION WEAPONS.

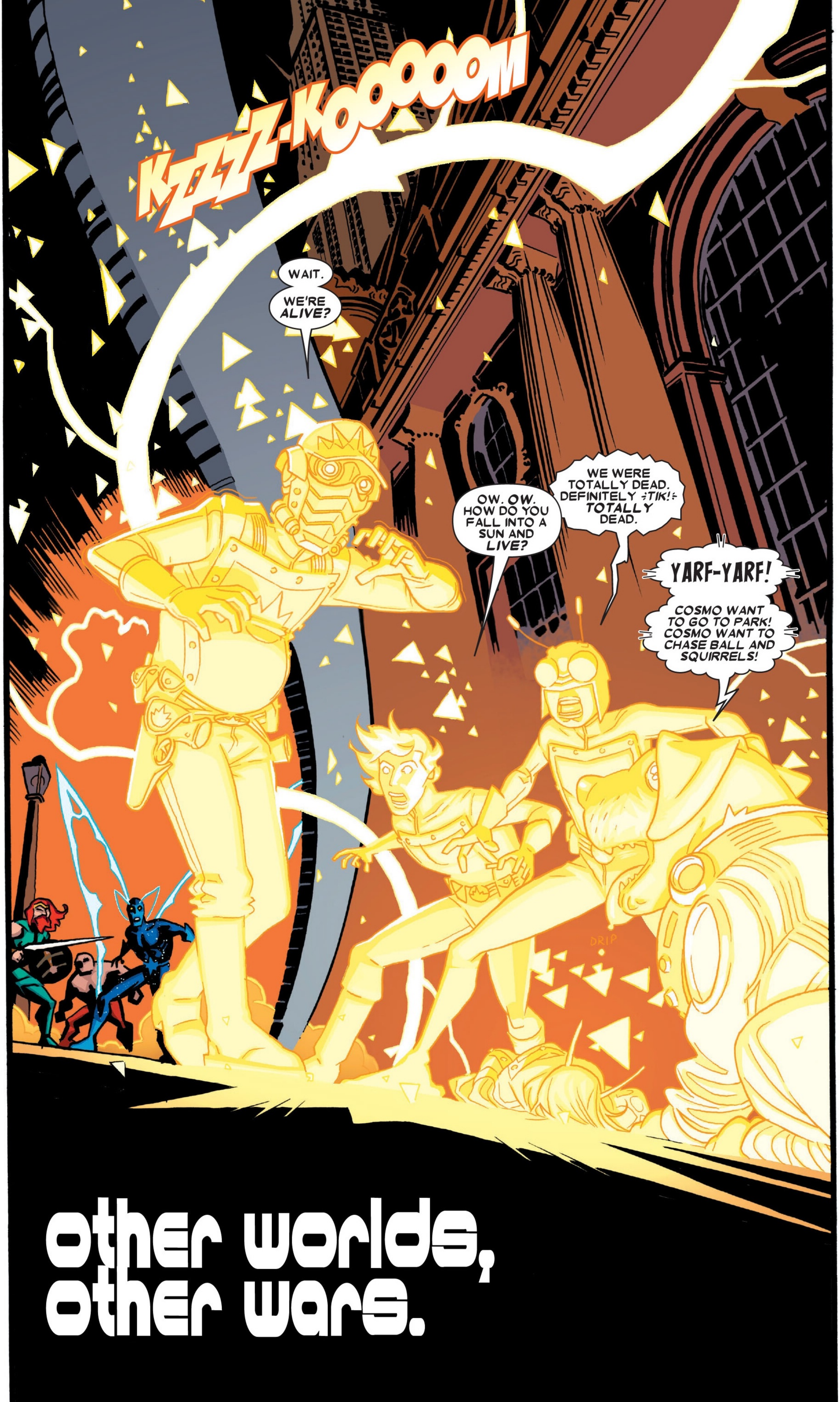
VASSSH
VASSSH


THESE ARE THE MONSTROUS MECHANISMS WITH WHICH THEY WON THE WAR OF TWO WORLDS.

NIKKI!

UGHNNN!

COME ON! COME ON, THEN! I WAS AN AVENGER ONCE, YOU SONS OF [illegible]!
TAKE YOUR BEST SHOT!
ARE YOU CRAZY, OLD MAN?
WHHHRRRRR
WHAT THE HELL? THEY'VE FROZEN!
STARHAWK?
IT IS AS I SAID JUST NOW. TIME IS HESITATING. TIME IS STAMMERING.
I CAN TASTE A FLOOD OF TACHYONS ON MY TONGUE, BITTER AS--



other worlds,
other wars.

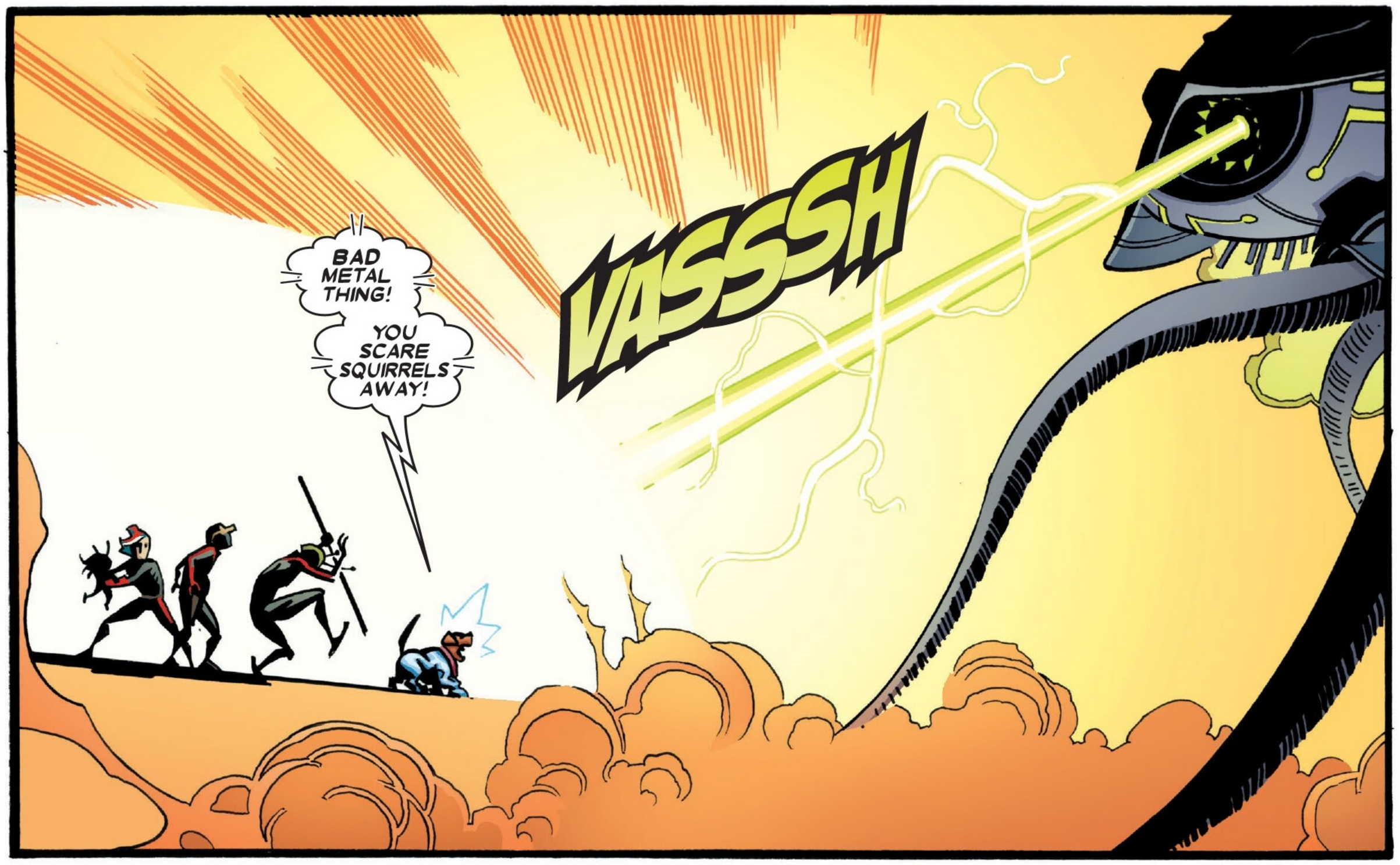
WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO US? WHERE'S MANTIS?
PETER! I'VE GOT HER! AT LEAST I THINK IT'S HER...
OH BOY.

A-GAH. BAH BOO.
JACK, WHAT THE SHUG IS GOING ON? COSMO'S A PUPPY AND BUG LOOKS LIKE AN EXTRA FROM ALIEN HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL!
WHAT? WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT THERE... GRANDPA?
OH GREAT.

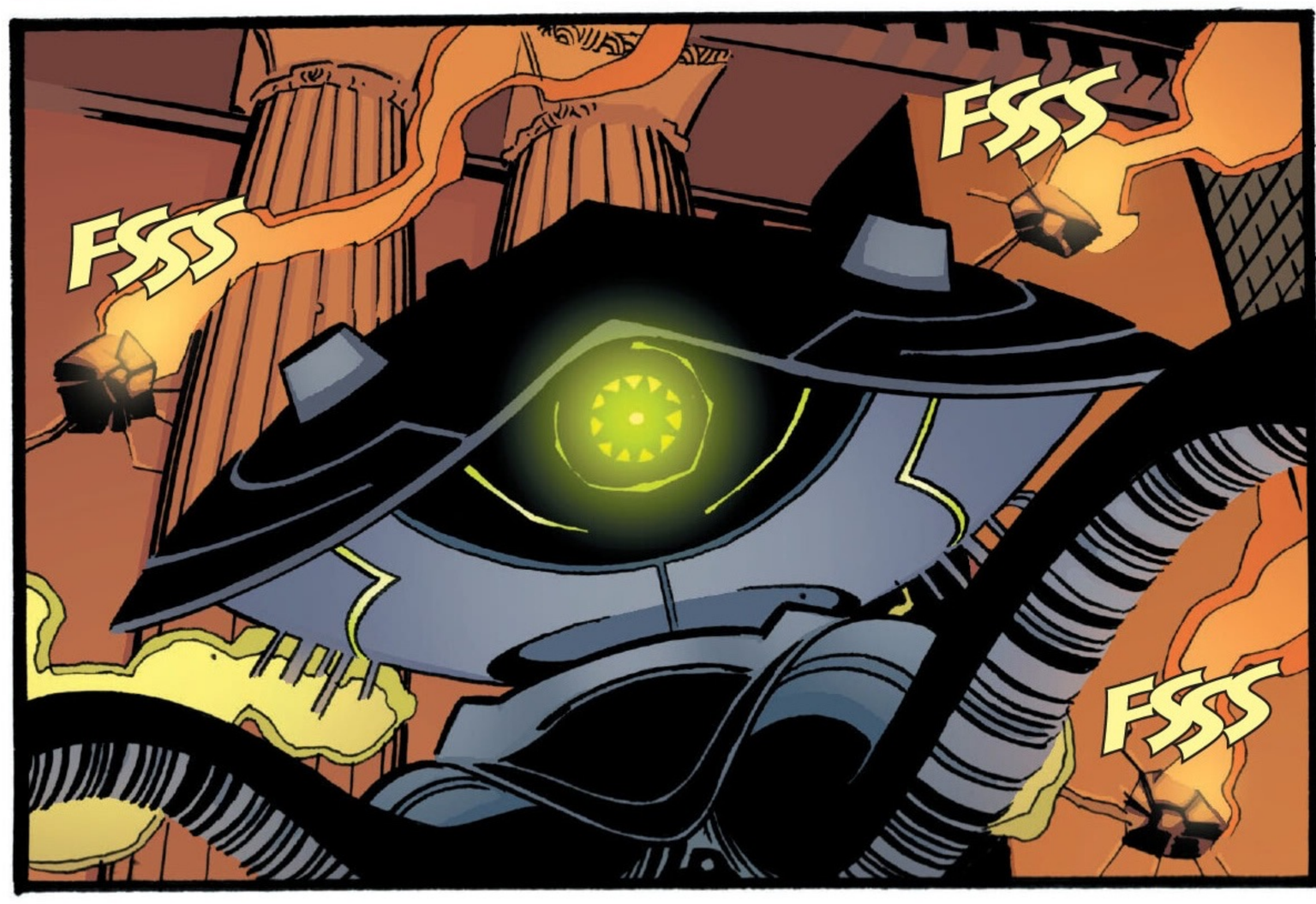
SO WHAT ARE THESE BIG METAL THINGS? THEY'RE MOVING.
WILL THEY PLAY WITH COSMO?

WHZZZZZZZ...
GRRRRRRRR!


BAD METAL THING!
YOU SCARE SQUIRRELS AWAY!
VASSSH

VASSSH
VASSSH
WHINE!

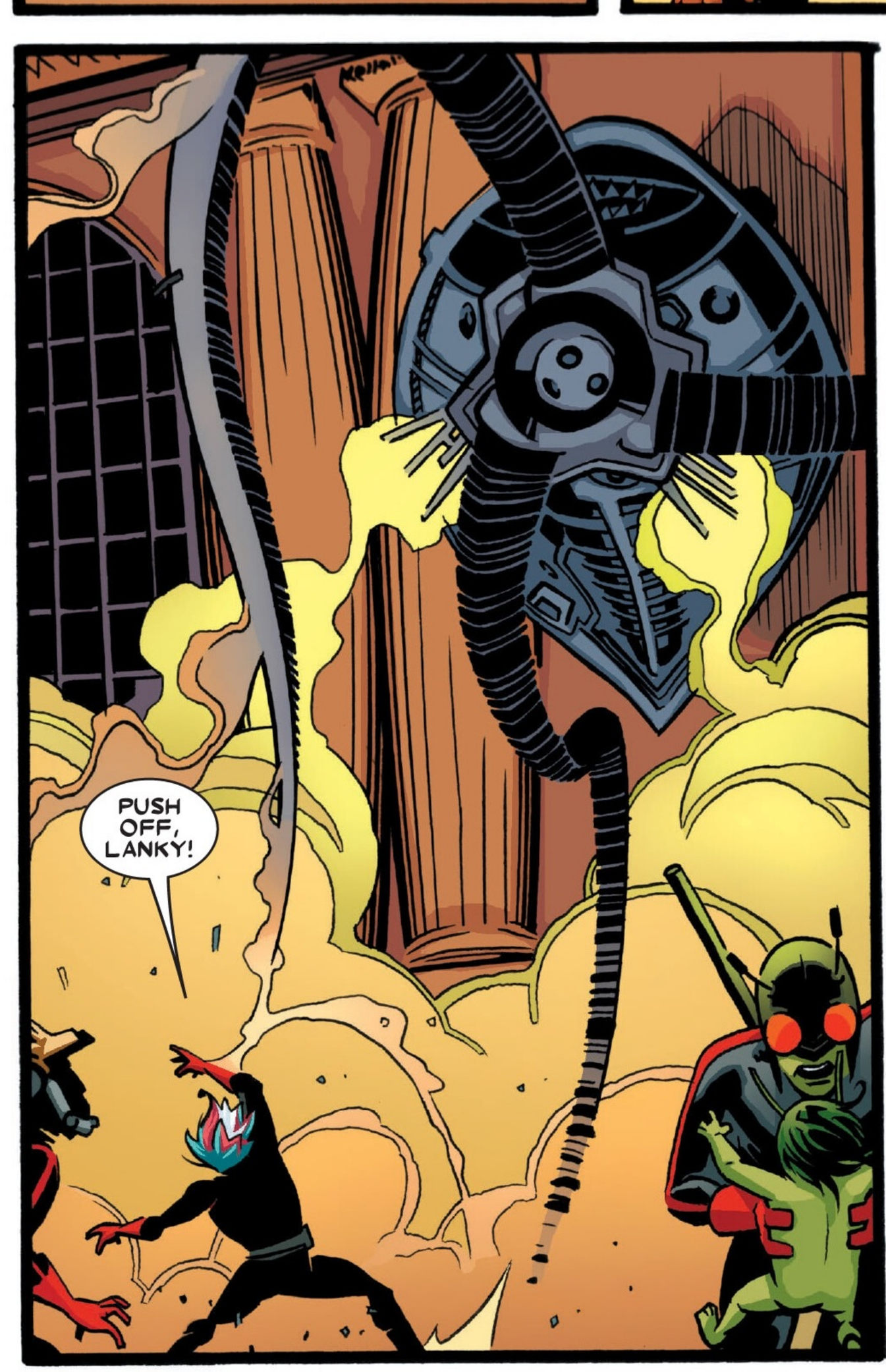
GUNS? LOAD EXPLOSIVE PENETRATORS!
RKLAK RKLAK
YOU HAVE SELECTED: EXPLOSIVE PENETRATORS.
BRAAKA
BRAAAKA
SHOOT AT US WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A HELLO FIRST, WILL YOU?
YOU ARE GOING HOME BROKEN.

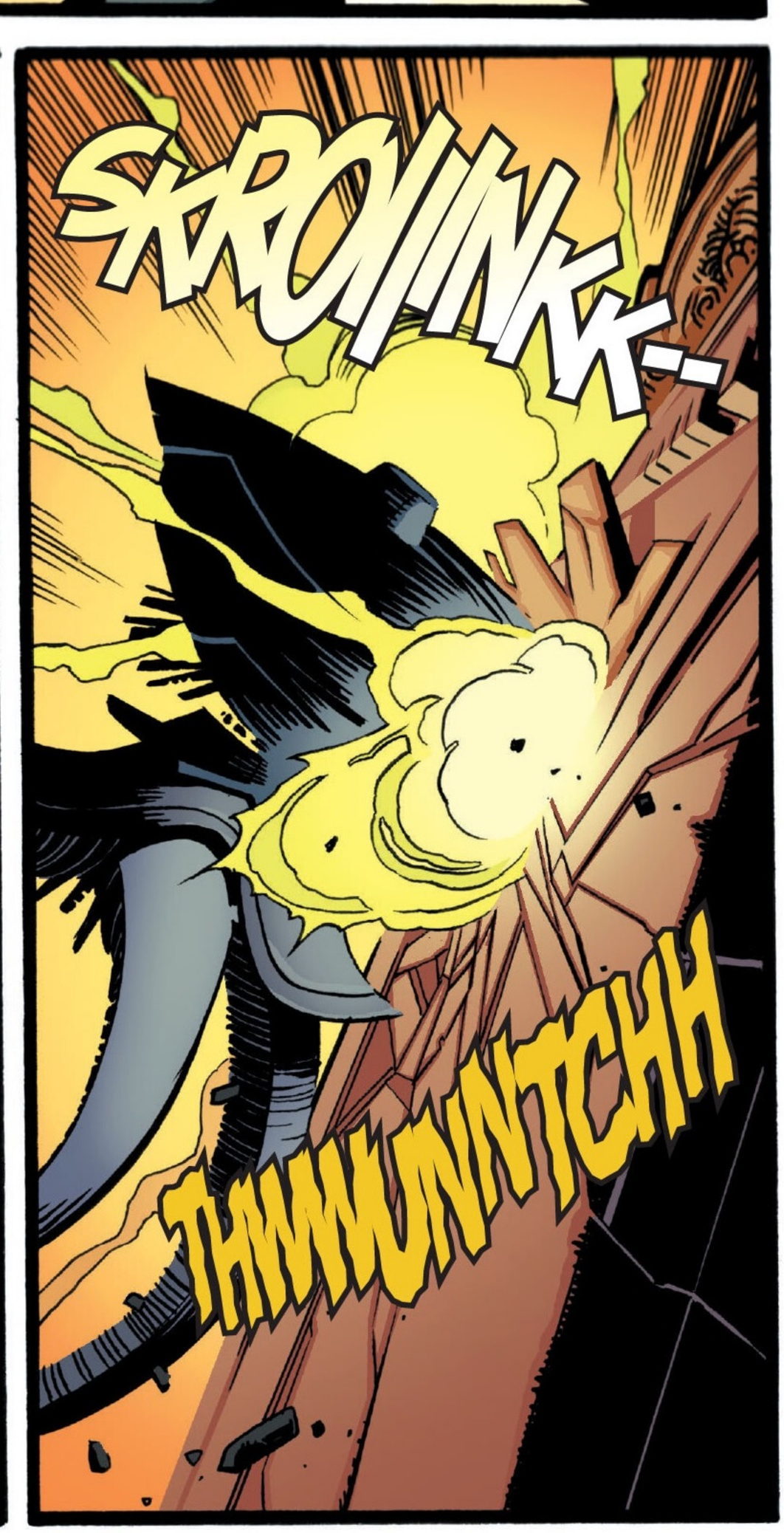

FSSS
FSSS
FSSS

I--I MISSED THEM ALL?

MAYBE I NEED GLASSES NOW...

UNNNFF!
JEEZ, PETE! GET OUTTA THE WAY!
BOY'S GOT PLUCK, GOTTA GIVE HIM THAT.
YARF! YARF!


PUSH OFF, LANKY!


SKROINKK--
THWWUNNTCHH

WHO THE HECK *ARE* THESE GUYS, 'RAVEN? WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?

I DON'T KNOW, CHARLIE, BUT IF THEY'RE BRAVE ENOUGH TO GO UP AGAINST *TRIPODS*, I'M NOT GOING TO LEAVE THEM TO FEND FOR THEMSELVES!

GUARDIANS! ATTA--

WAAAAY AHEAD OF YOU, 'RAVEN!

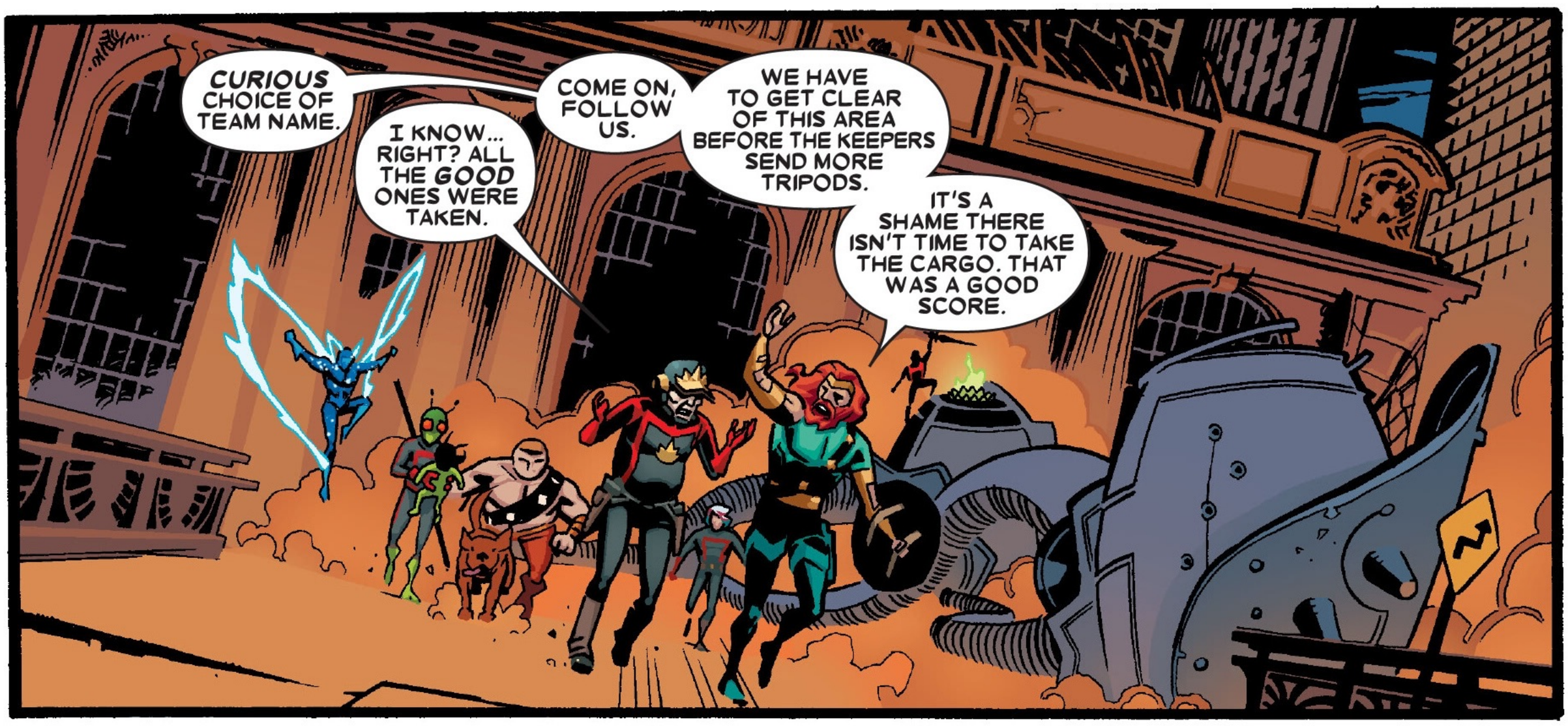
WAITAMINUTE, OLD MAN! YOU CAN *FLY*?

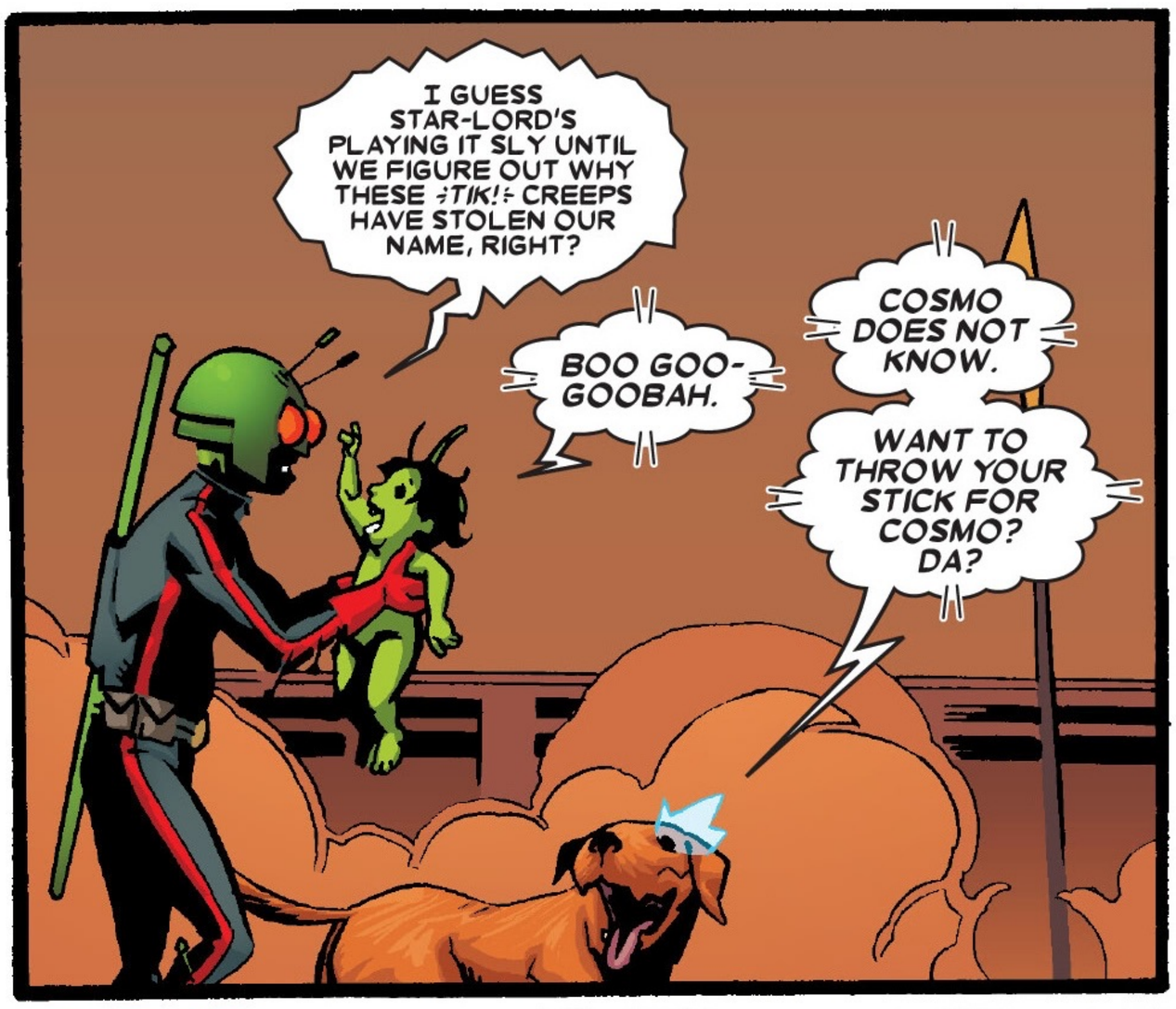
I'M ON THE OTHER ONE!
CHARLIE? THAT YOU?
HUH? DO I *KNOW* YOU, PAL?
OF COURSE! WE MET A FEW HOURS AGO AT THE END OF THE UNIVERSE? THE *FAULT?*
YOU *MUST* REMEMBER. I BROKE YOUR RIB.
YOU'VE GOT ME CONFUSED WITH SOMEONE *ELSE*, PAL!
NOW *GET DOWN!*
VASSSH
STEEL UPON STEEL! DEATH TO THE KEEPERS!

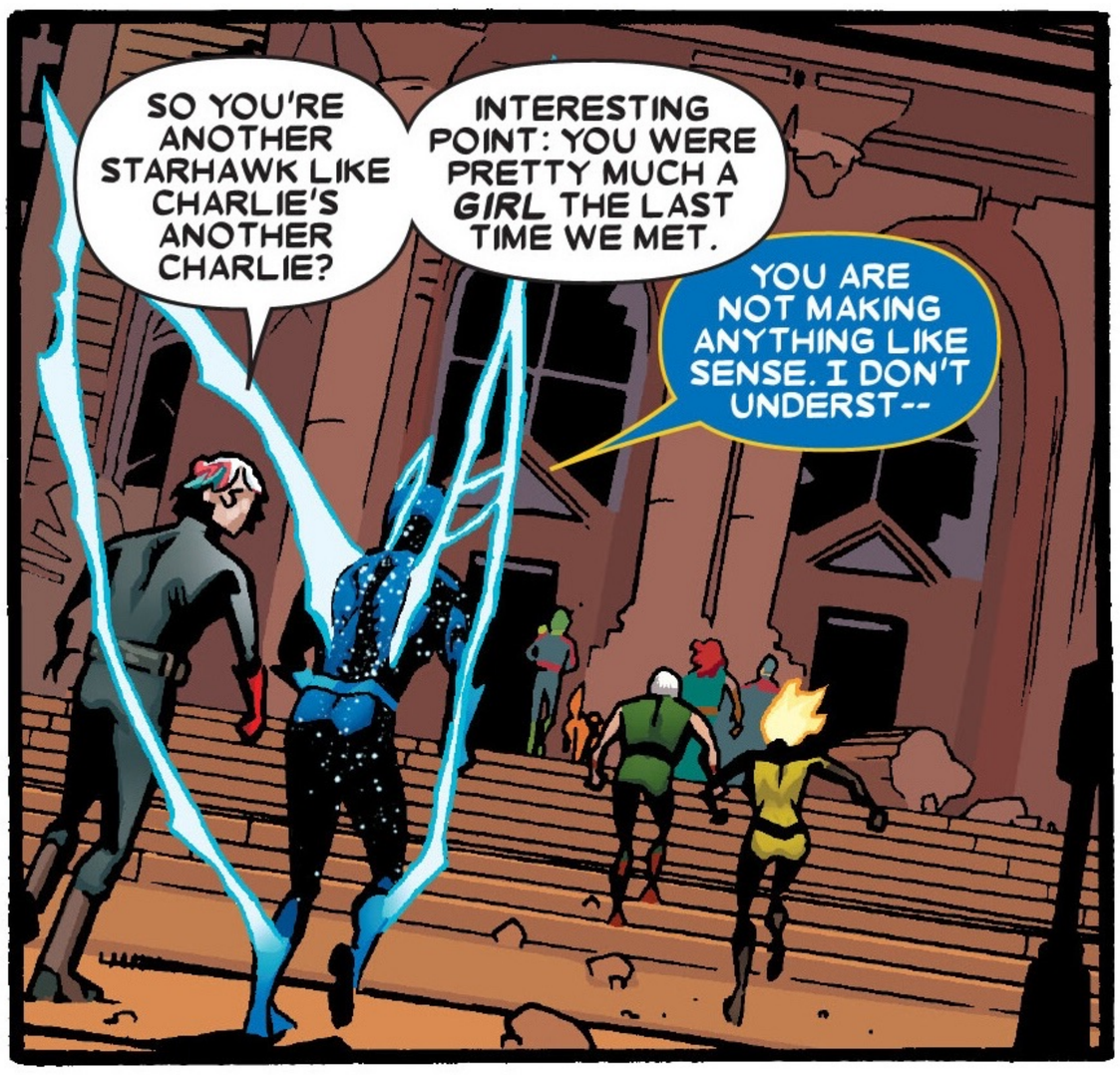
THUNK

WOW. THAT'S JUST ABOUT THE *COOLEST* THING I'VE EVER SEEN ANYBODY DO WITH THEIR CLOTHES ON, YOUNG MAN.
I'M PETER QUILL, STAR-LORD. AT LEAST I *THINK* I AM.
I SEEM TO BE HAVING THE MOTHER OF ALL SENIOR MOMENTS.

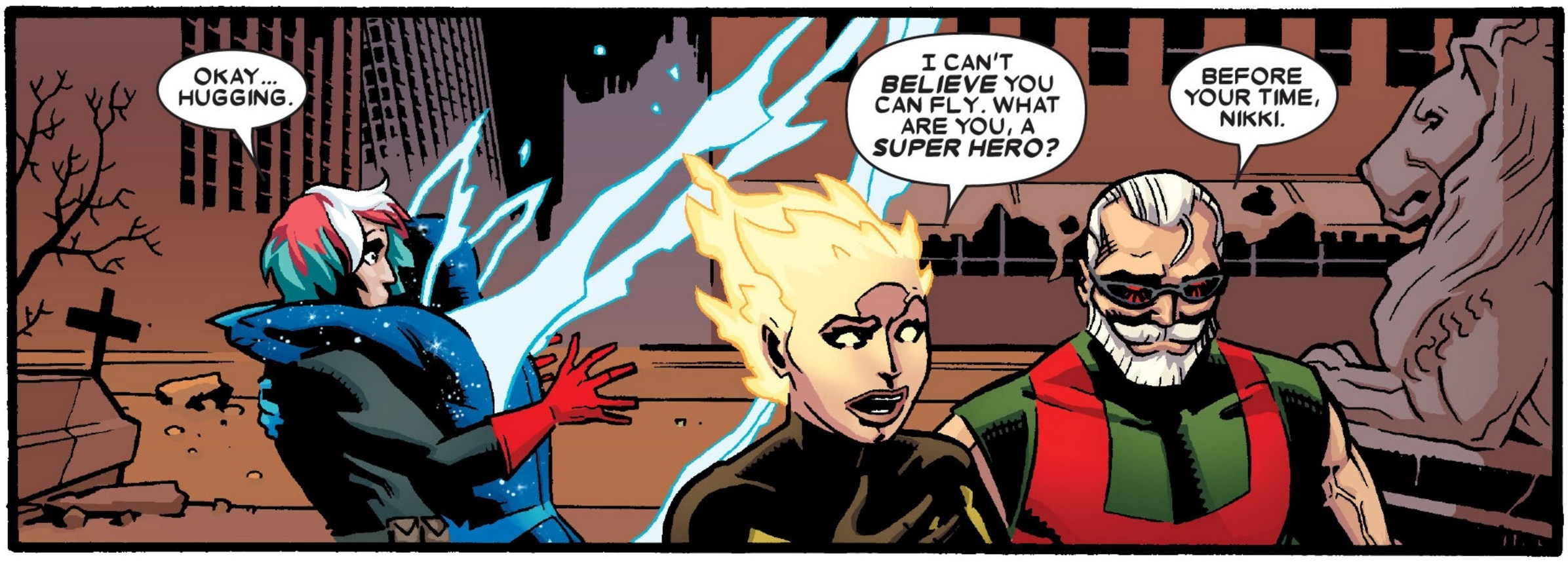
I'M JONATHAN RAVEN... KILLRAVEN.
MY COMRADES AND I ARE KNOWN AS THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY.
ARE THEY, INDEED? GOOD NAME.
MY COMRADES AND I ARE KNOWN AS THE... THE *BUTT KICKERS OF THE FANTASTIC.*


CURIOUS CHOICE OF TEAM NAME.
I KNOW... RIGHT? ALL THE GOOD ONES WERE TAKEN.
COME ON, FOLLOW US.
WE HAVE TO GET CLEAR OF THIS AREA BEFORE THE KEEPERS SEND MORE TRIPODS.
IT'S A SHAME THERE ISN'T TIME TO TAKE THE CARGO. THAT WAS A GOOD SCORE.


I GUESS STAR-LORD'S PLAYING IT SLY UNTIL WE FIGURE OUT WHY THESE ÷TIK!÷ CREEPS HAVE STOLEN OUR NAME, RIGHT?
BOO GOO-GOOBAH.
COSMO DOES NOT KNOW.
WANT TO THROW YOUR STICK FOR COSMO? DA?

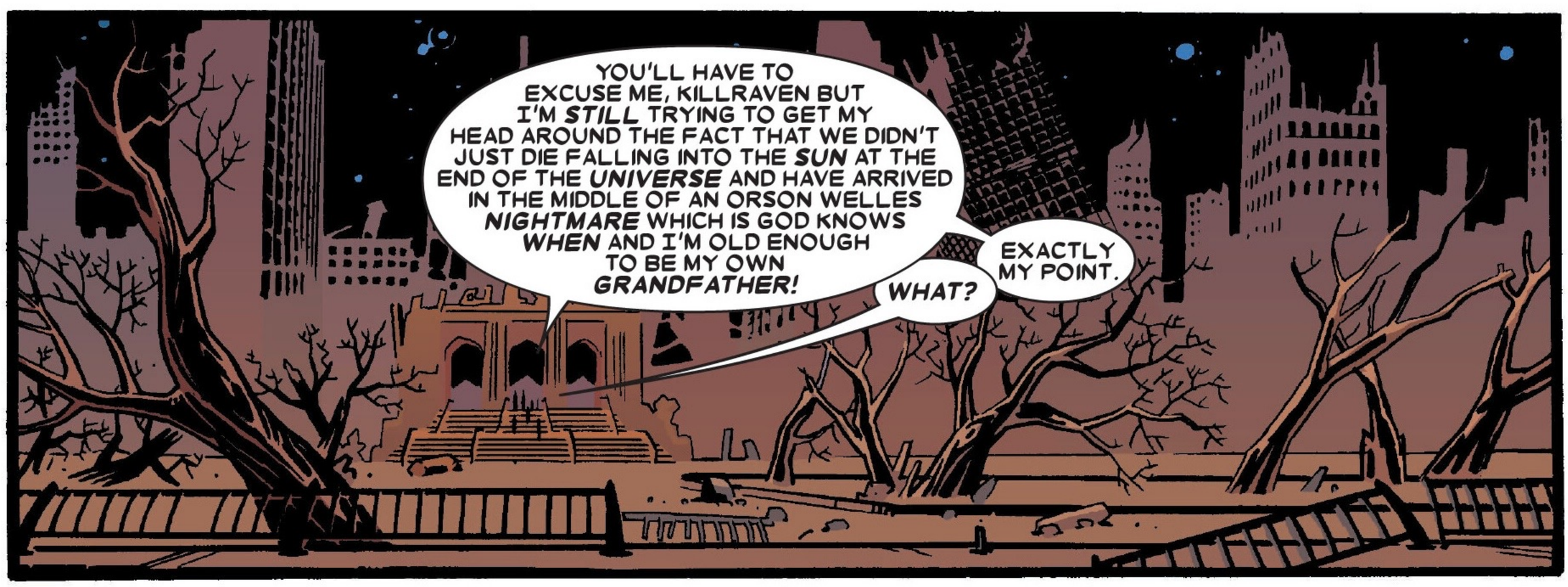

SO YOU'RE ANOTHER STARHAWK LIKE CHARLIE'S ANOTHER CHARLIE?
INTERESTING POINT: YOU WERE PRETTY MUCH A GIRL THE LAST TIME WE MET.
YOU ARE NOT MAKING ANYTHING LIKE SENSE. I DON'T UNDERST--

UGHHN!
GREAT MAKER! IN MY MIND, I...I SUDDENLY SAW ALL MY OTHERSELVES AND THEY TOLD ME WHO YOU ARE!

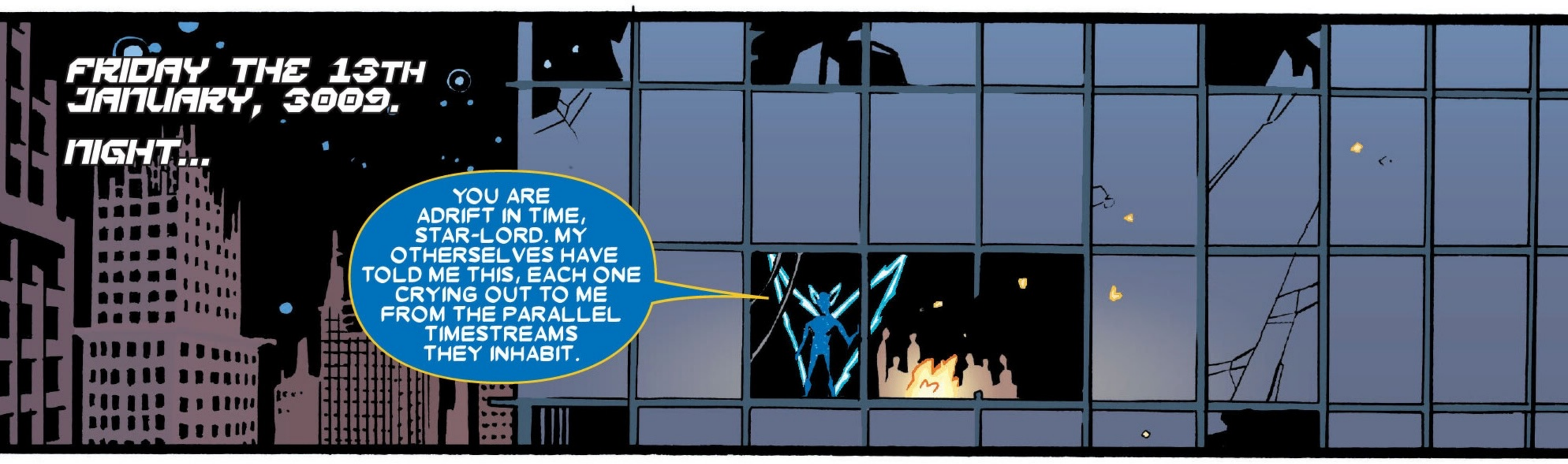

OKAY... HUGGING.
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU CAN FLY. WHAT ARE YOU, A SUPER HERO?
BEFORE YOUR TIME, NIKKI.

BUT YOU CAN *FLY?*
I HAVEN'T HAD THE STRENGTH OR CONFIDENCE TO DO THAT IN *YEARS*, GIRL. I'M OLD, LIKE YOU *KEEP* TELLING ME.
BUT SEEING THESE GUYS GO FOR IT AGAINST *TRIPODS*, LORD...
THE STRENGTH JUST CAME BACK.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN FIGHTING THE KEEPERS?
THE *WHO?*
THE KEEPERS? YOU KNOW, THE *MARTIANS?*
THEM? OH, ALL OF THREE OR FOUR *MINUTES.*

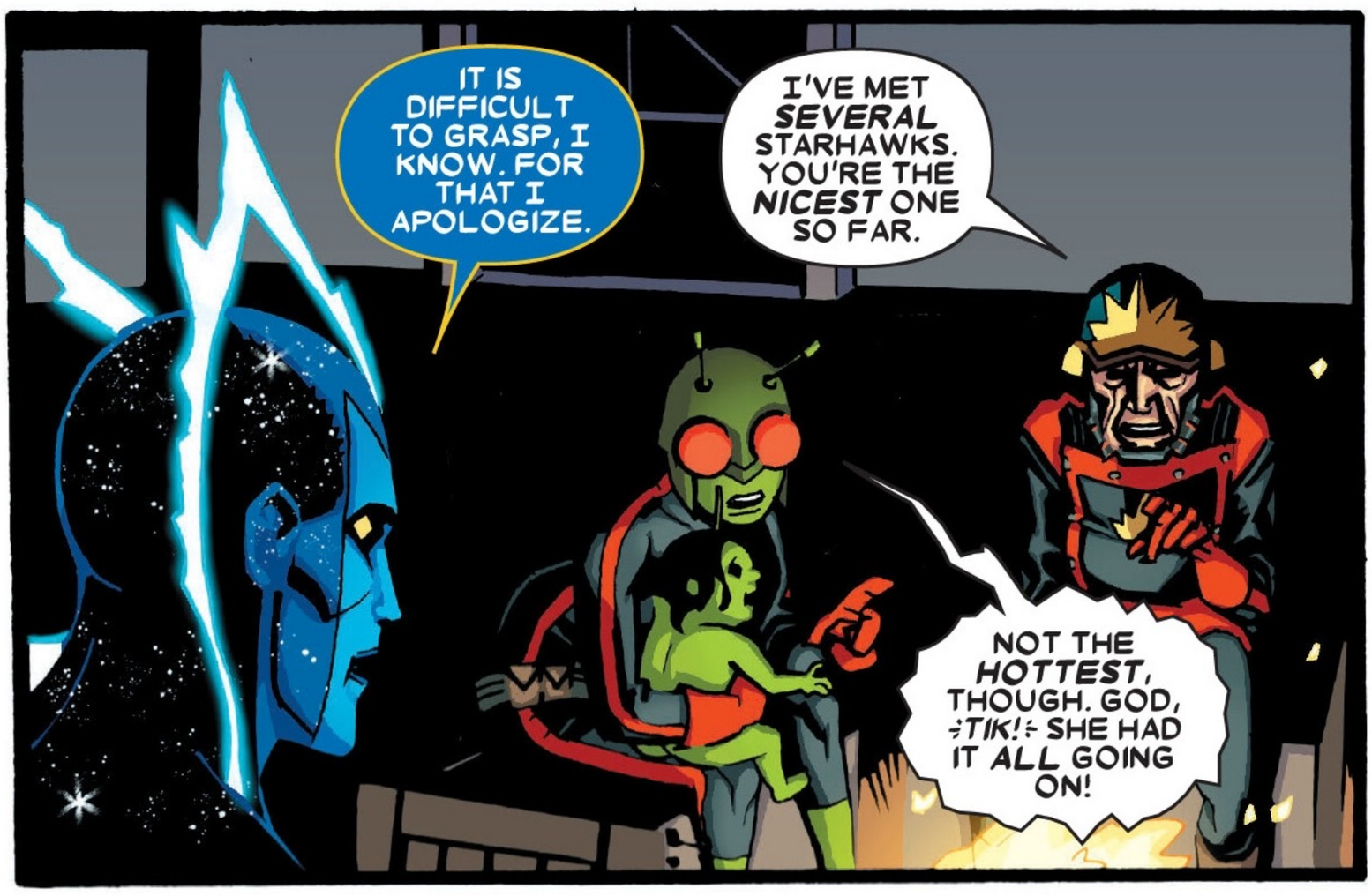

YOU'LL HAVE TO EXCUSE ME, KILLRAVEN BUT I'M *STILL* TRYING TO GET MY HEAD AROUND THE FACT THAT WE DIDN'T JUST DIE FALLING INTO THE *SUN* AT THE END OF THE *UNIVERSE* AND HAVE ARRIVED IN THE MIDDLE OF AN ORSON WELLES *NIGHTMARE* WHICH IS GOD KNOWS *WHEN* AND I'M OLD ENOUGH TO BE MY OWN *GRANDFATHER!*
EXACTLY MY POINT.
WHAT?

WELL, LET'S GET TO ONE OF OUR SAFE HOUSES AND SEE IF WE CAN ANSWER *ANY* OF THESE QUESTIONS.


FRIDAY THE 13TH JANUARY, 3009.
NIGHT...
YOU ARE ADRIFT IN TIME, STAR-LORD. MY OTHERSELVES HAVE TOLD ME THIS, EACH ONE CRYING OUT TO ME FROM THE PARALLEL TIMESTREAMS THEY INHABIT.

TIME HAS BECOME DAMAGED AND DISRUPTED.
YOU ARE SLIPPING IN AND OUT OF REALITIES AS THE TIME RIPPLES CARRY YOU.
LET ME GET MY BEFUDDLED OLD HEAD AROUND THAT.
THE FUTURE WE *WERE* IN CAME TO AN END AND WE GOT SPIT OUT INTO A DIFFERENT ONE?

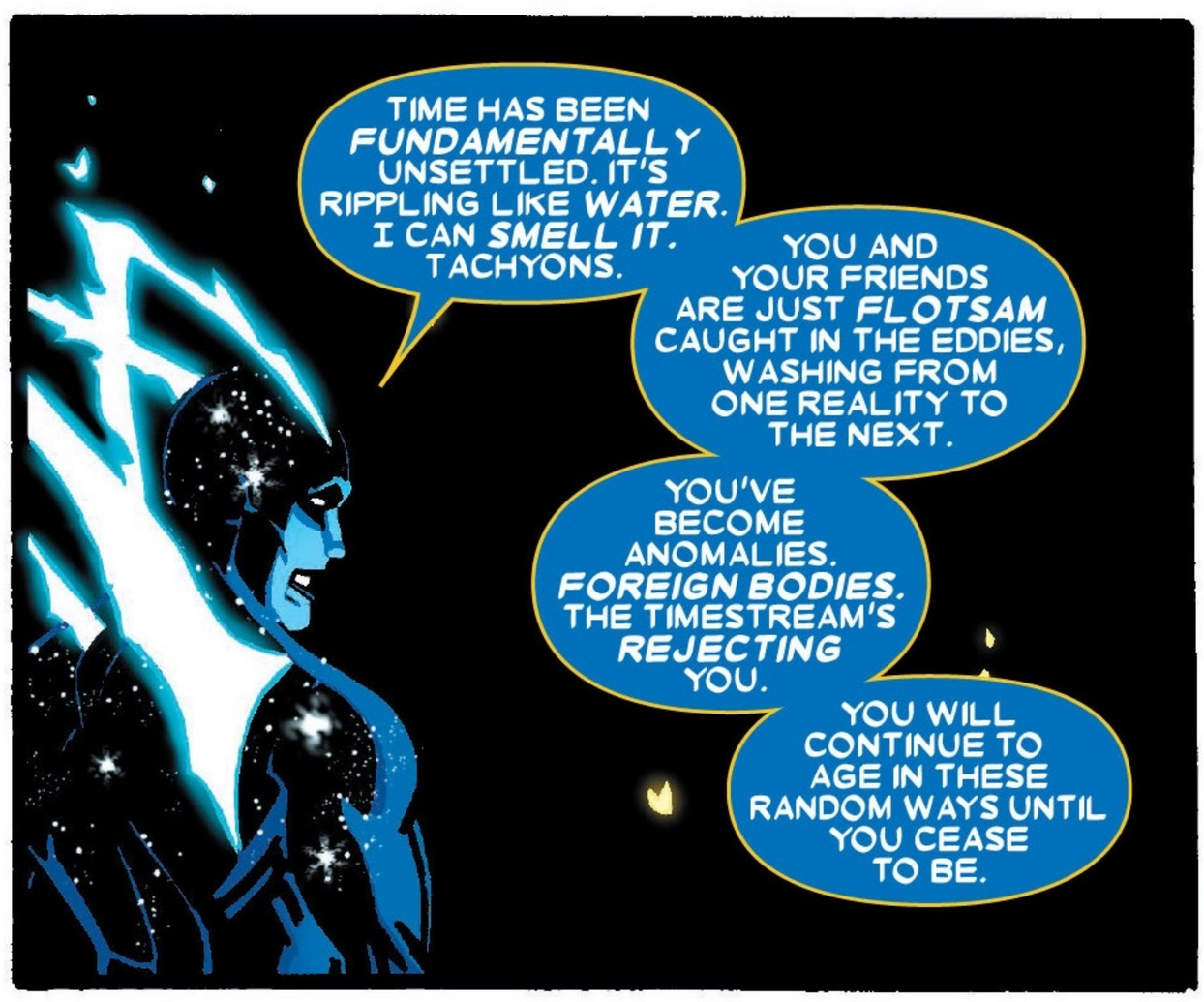
ESSENTIALLY, *YES*.
YOU ARE *STILL* IN THE FUTURE, STAR-LORD. IT IS SIMPLY A *DIFFERENT* FUTURE.
ANOTHER ITERATION OF ME BROUGHT YOU TO THIS TIMESTREAM. NOW I KNOW WHAT *SHE* KNEW AND ALL THE *OTHER* STARHAWKS BEFORE HER KNEW.


IT IS DIFFICULT TO GRASP, I KNOW. FOR THAT I APOLOGIZE.
I'VE MET *SEVERAL* STARHAWKS. YOU'RE THE *NICEST* ONE SO FAR.
NOT THE *HOTTEST*, THOUGH. GOD, ÷TIK!÷ SHE HAD IT *ALL* GOING ON!

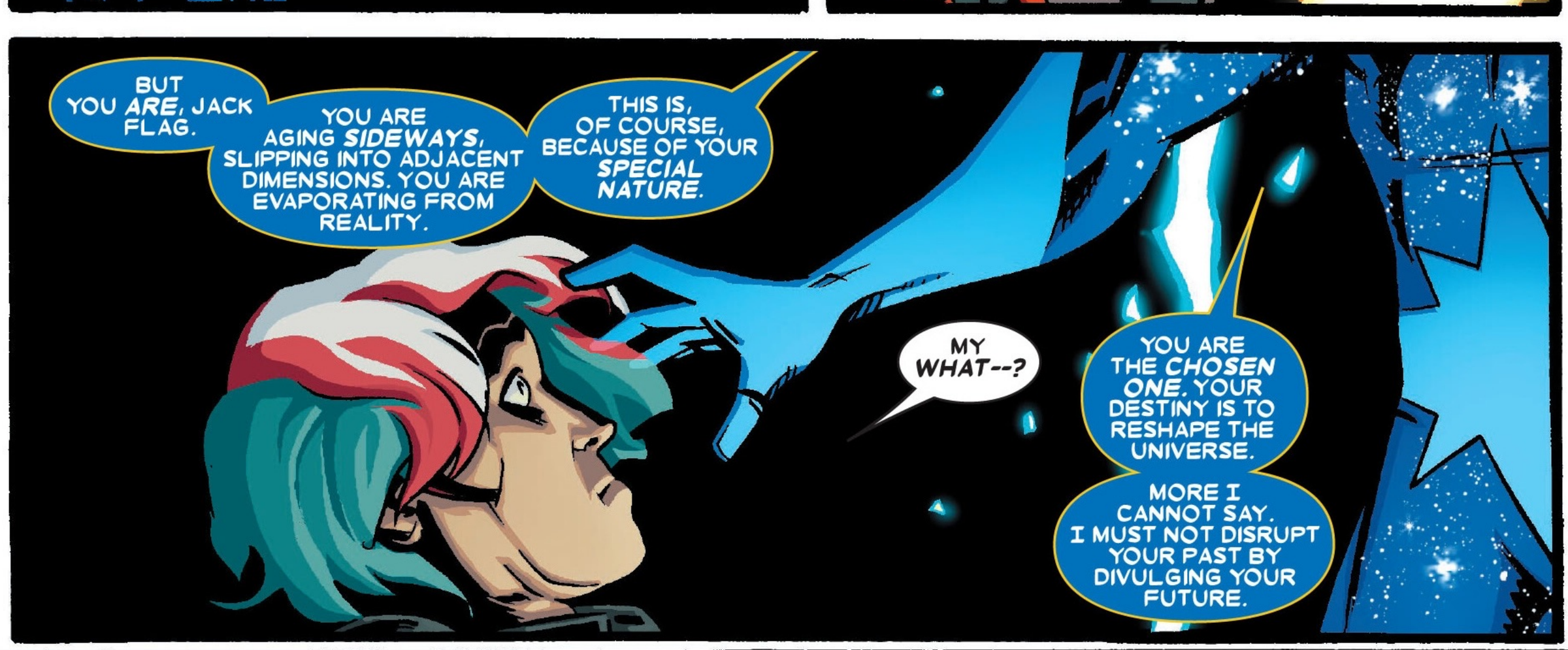
WATCH YOUR MOUTH, CHILD.
SORRY ÷TIK!÷ SIR.

THAT DOESN'T EXPLAIN *US! SHE'S* NOT A BABY! *I'M* NOT AN OLD MAN, I'M 32! WE'VE *ALL* BEEN TEMPORALLY ALTERED SOMEHOW.
EXCEPT *JACK* THAT IS.
YEAH, WHAT'S UP WITH *THAT?*

THE FUTURE TENSE IS IN FLUX--
BUT I *AM* THE ONE WHO KNOWS.
YES! YOU *SEE? THAT'S* THE REASSURING STUFF I WANTED TO HEAR! *"I AM THE ONE WHO KNOWS!"* ALL *THAT* CRAP!


TIME HAS BEEN *FUNDAMENTALLY* UNSETTLED. IT'S RIPPLING LIKE *WATER.* I CAN *SMELL IT.* TACHYONS.
YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS ARE JUST *FLOTSAM* CAUGHT IN THE EDDIES, WASHING FROM ONE REALITY TO THE NEXT.
YOU'VE BECOME ANOMALIES. *FOREIGN BODIES.* THE TIMESTREAM'S *REJECTING* YOU.
YOU WILL CONTINUE TO AGE IN THESE RANDOM WAYS UNTIL YOU CEASE TO BE.

THAT'S NOT VERY REASSURING.
BUT WHAT ABOUT *ME?!* WHY AREN'T *I* AGING EITHER WAY?!


BUT YOU *ARE,* JACK FLAG.
YOU ARE AGING *SIDEWAYS,* SLIPPING INTO ADJACENT DIMENSIONS. YOU ARE EVAPORATING FROM REALITY.
THIS IS, OF COURSE, BECAUSE OF YOUR *SPECIAL NATURE.*
MY *WHAT--?*
YOU ARE THE *CHOSEN ONE.* YOUR DESTINY IS TO RESHAPE THE UNIVERSE.
MORE I CANNOT SAY. I MUST NOT DISRUPT YOUR PAST BY DIVULGING YOUR FUTURE.

YOU CAN'T DROP A BOMBSHELL LIKE THAT AND JUST *LEAVE* IT!
ENOUGH! IT'S PRETTY CLEAR WE NEED TO GET OURSELVES HOME BEFORE IT'S *TOO LATE.*
YOU DON'T HAPPEN TO HAVE A TIME MACHINE HIDDEN AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE?
NOT HERE, BUT WE KNOW WHERE YOU MIGHT GET YOUR HANDS ON ONE...

THIS IS THE KEEPERS' MAIN COMMAND NODE. IT'S WHERE THEY FIRST LANDED, AND IT'S WHERE WE MADE OUR STAND. WE LOST *MANY* THAT DAY.

SINCE THEN WE'VE BEEN FIGHTING A WAR OF SUBSISTENCE. HIT-AND-RUN TACTICS. GETTING VITAL SUPPLIES FOR THE POCKETS OF FREEMEN HIDING OUT AROUND THE CITY.

WAITING FOR THE DAY WHEN WE WILL BE *STRONG* ENOUGH TO FIGHT BACK.

THE NODE IS SURROUNDED BY AN IMPENETRABLE FORCE FIELD. YOU TOUCH IT, YOU *DIE*.

BUT HOLLYWOOD ASSURES ME THAT THE AVENGERS MANSION HAS A SUBLEVEL VAULT FILLED WITH ENOUGH WEAPONRY TO TURN THE TIDE OF THIS BATTLE.

AND A CERTAIN LATVERIAN DOCTOR'S *TIME MACHINE*.

I'M SOLD. WE'D BETTER GET MOVING.

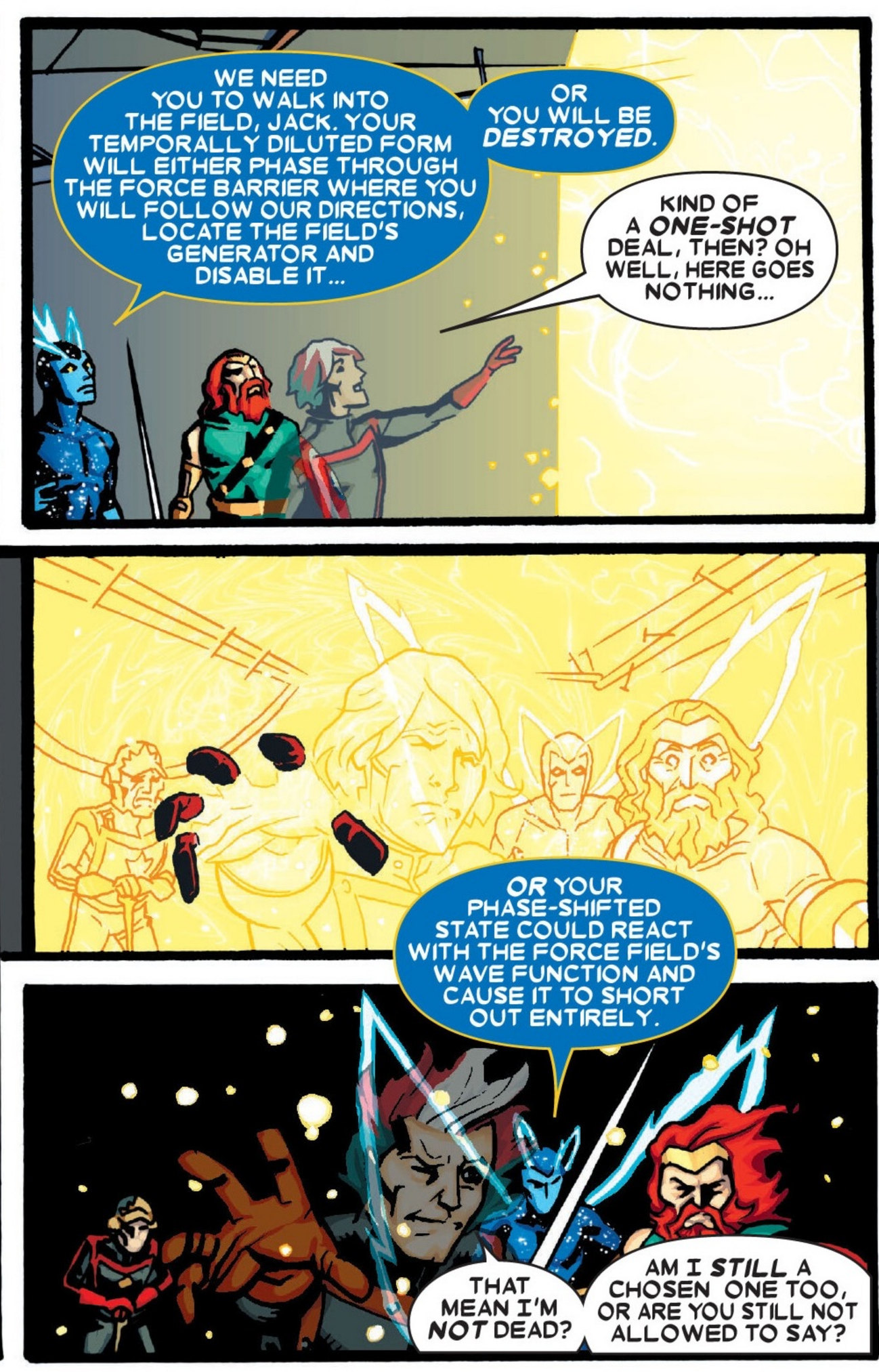
IF WE WAIT ANY LONGER I'M GOING TO NEED A WALKER.

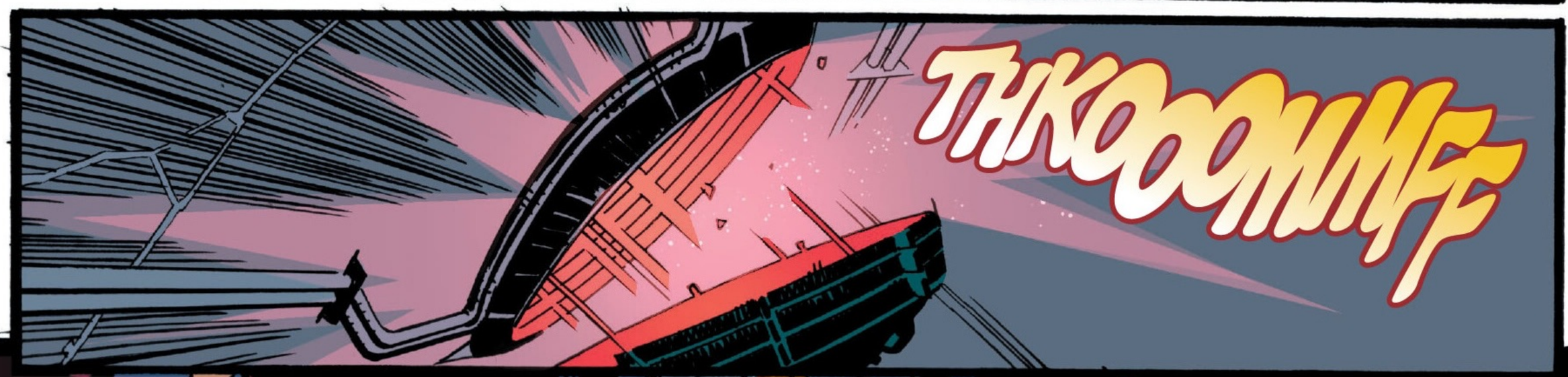
5TH AV.

I HOPE WE'VE GOT A PLAN, I'M BARELY *HERE!*
IT'S WHAT WE'RE GAMBLING ON, JACK.
SPEAK UP! WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
YOU'LL SEE, MY FRIEND, YOU'LL SEE.

SEE, OH YE OF LITTLE FAITH, JUST LIKE I TOLD YOU.
WHEN I WAS AN AVENGER WE USED THIS TUNNEL LINK FROM THE BAXTER BUILDING TO THE MANSION FOR OUR FRIDAY POKER NIGHTS.
THE THING STILL OWES ME A COOL GRAND, TOO. GUESS I'LL NEVER SEE THAT NOW. I'D GIVE UP ALL MY WINNINGS JUST TO SEE HIS STONY ORANGE MUG AGAIN...
BOO-BOO-BOO-POOP.
OKAY, OLD TIMER, DON'T GO RATTLING YOURSELF, YOU'RE UPSETTING THE BABY.
SHHH! THERE, THERE, SWEETIE.

JACK, WE NEED YOU, MY FRIEND. WE NEED TO USE YOUR, *UHM, "CONDITION"* TO OUR ADVANTAGE.
WHAT? I CAN *BARELY* HEAR YOU!
I SAID, IT'S UP TO *YOU* NOW.
WE'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO PENETRATE THE FIELD, BUT STARHAWK BELIEVES YOU CAN.
DON'T TELL ME. BECAUSE I'M *"THE CHOSEN ONE"*?

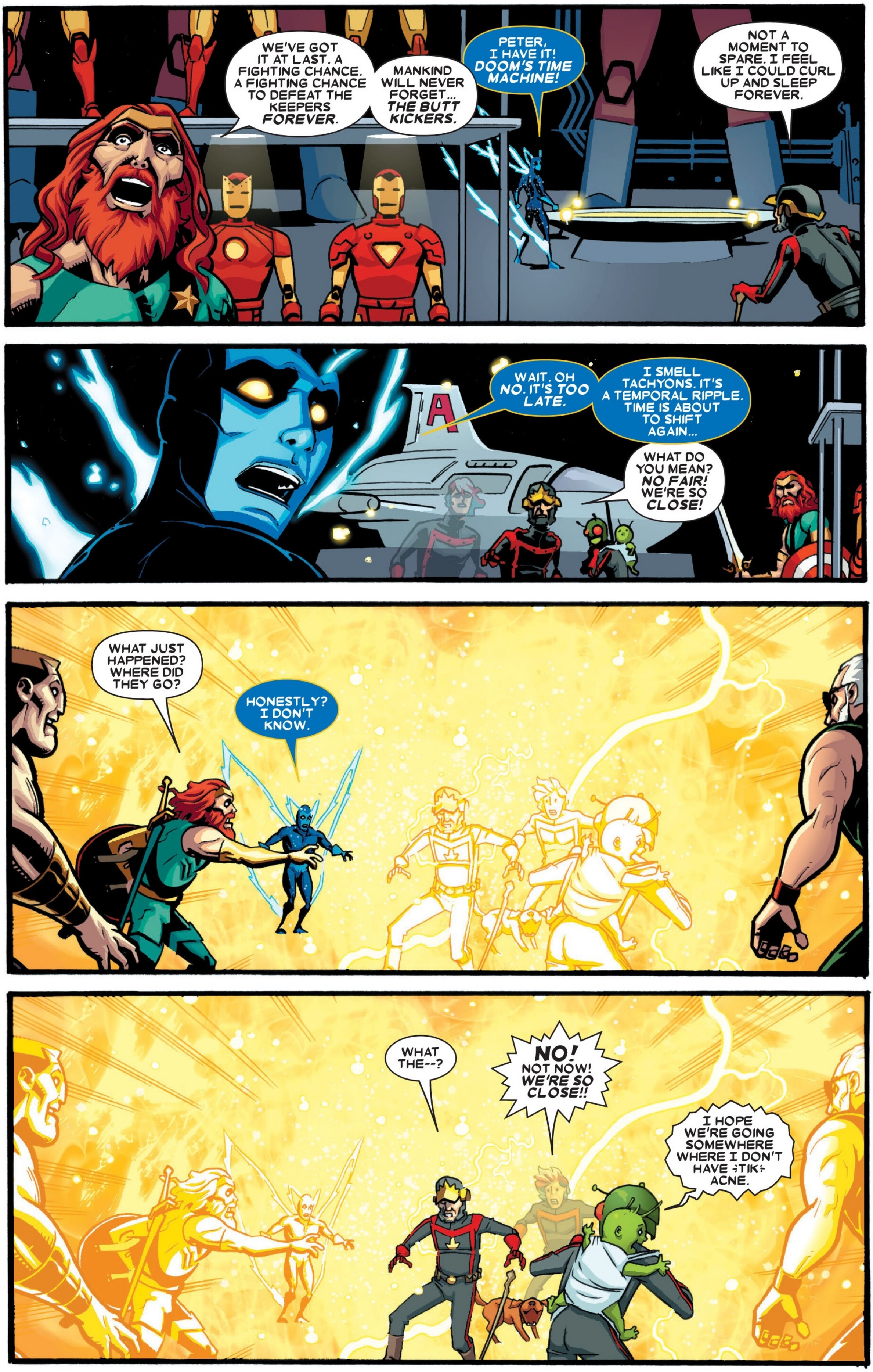

WE NEED YOU TO WALK INTO THE FIELD, JACK. YOUR TEMPORALLY DILUTED FORM WILL EITHER PHASE THROUGH THE FORCE BARRIER WHERE YOU WILL FOLLOW OUR DIRECTIONS, LOCATE THE FIELD'S GENERATOR AND DISABLE IT...
OR YOU WILL BE *DESTROYED.*
KIND OF A *ONE-SHOT* DEAL, THEN? OH WELL, HERE GOES NOTHING...
OR YOUR PHASE-SHIFTED STATE COULD REACT WITH THE FORCE FIELD'S WAVE FUNCTION AND CAUSE IT TO SHORT OUT ENTIRELY.
THAT MEAN I'M *NOT* DEAD?
AM I *STILL* A CHOSEN ONE TOO, OR ARE YOU STILL NOT ALLOWED TO SAY?



HOLD THEM OFF! HOLD THEM *BACK!*

WHOA! THIS IS SOME *SERIOUS* SWAG!

HAVE YOU SEEN THE STUFF IN HERE? REMIND ME NEVER TO DOUBT YOU AGAIN, OLD MAN!


WE'VE GOT IT AT LAST. A FIGHTING CHANCE. A FIGHTING CHANCE TO DEFEAT THE KEEPERS FOREVER.
MANKIND WILL NEVER FORGET... THE BUTT KICKERS.
PETER, I HAVE IT! DOOM'S TIME MACHINE!
NOT A MOMENT TO SPARE. I FEEL LIKE I COULD CURL UP AND SLEEP FOREVER.
WAIT. OH NO. IT'S TOO LATE.
I SMELL TACHYONS. IT'S A TEMPORAL RIPPLE. TIME IS ABOUT TO SHIFT AGAIN...
WHAT DO YOU MEAN? NO FAIR! WE'RE SO CLOSE!
WHAT JUST HAPPENED? WHERE DID THEY GO?
HONESTLY? I DON'T KNOW.
WHAT THE--?
NO! NOT NOW! WE'RE SO CLOSE!!
I HOPE WE'RE GOING SOMEWHERE WHERE I DON'T HAVE ÷TIK÷ ACNE.

FRIDAY THE 13TH JANUARY, 3009.
FRIDAY THE 13TH JANUARY, 3009.
FRIDAY THE 13TH JANUARY, 3009.

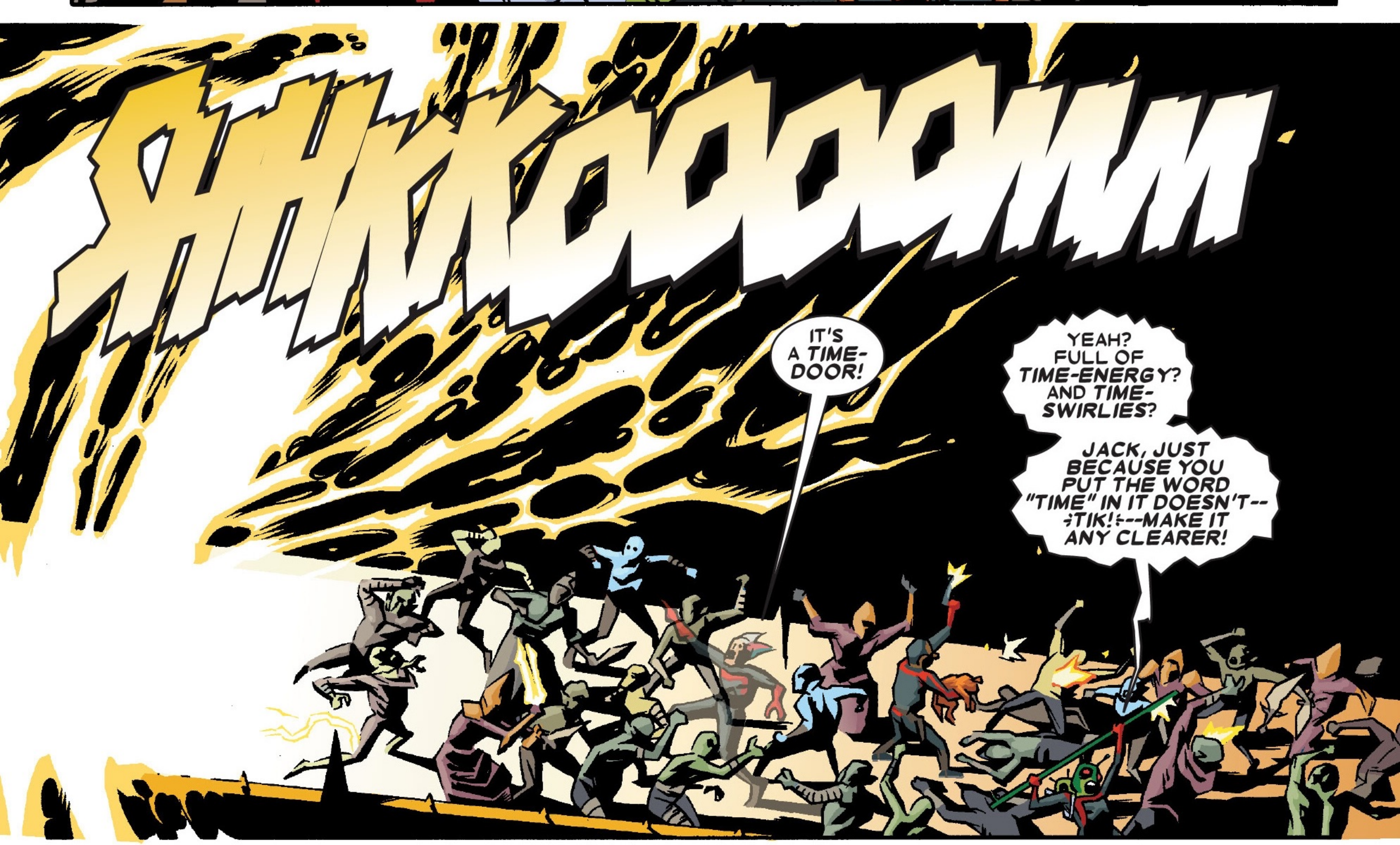
OOOWWW. THINK I BUSTED A HIP!
HEY. LOOK AT THAT. REMIND YOU OF ANYONE?
IN A BAD WAY?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN? THE GIANT ÷TIK÷ STATUE THAT LOOKS DISTRESSINGLY LIKE AN EVIL ADAM WARLOCK?
OR THE EVIL ADAM WARLOCK CARVINGS COVERING EVERY ÷TIK÷ INCH OF THIS PLACE?
FRIDAY THE 13TH JANUARY, 3009.

FORGET THE STATUE. WE'RE IN SERIOUS TROUBLE HERE.
AREN'T THERE ANY ÷TIK!÷ PEACEFUL TIMELINES WE COULD VISIT?!
IT'S THE CHURCH! IT'S THE CHURCH OF UNIVERSAL TRUTH!
YARF! THEIR MINDS TOO LOUD FOR COSMO!
WHY ARE THEY ALL SHOUTINK "MAGUS"?!

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY 19

FRIDAY THE 13TH JANUARY, 3009
HEADQUARTERS OF THE CHURCH OF UNIVERSAL TRUTH.
WE COULD JUST--TIK!--SURRENDER!
DO THEY LOOK LIKE THEY WANT US TO SURRENDER?
NOT SO MUCH.

GUYS?! CAN YOU HEAR ME?
JEEZ, I'M SLIPPING AWAY SO FAST!
GUYS, CAN YOU FEEL THAT? CAN YOU FEEL IT COMING?


IT'S A TIME-DOOR!
YEAH? FULL OF TIME-ENERGY? AND TIME-SWIRLIES?
JACK, JUST BECAUSE YOU PUT THE WORD "TIME" IN IT DOESN'T--TIK!--MAKE IT ANY CLEARER!

IT'S STARHAWK! LOTS OF-- TIK! --- STARHAWKS!
THERE'S SOMETHING COMING BEHIND THEM...
...SOMETHING SERIOUSLY HEAVY!
BRRKOOM
BRRKOOM
FLARK ME! THAT'S--

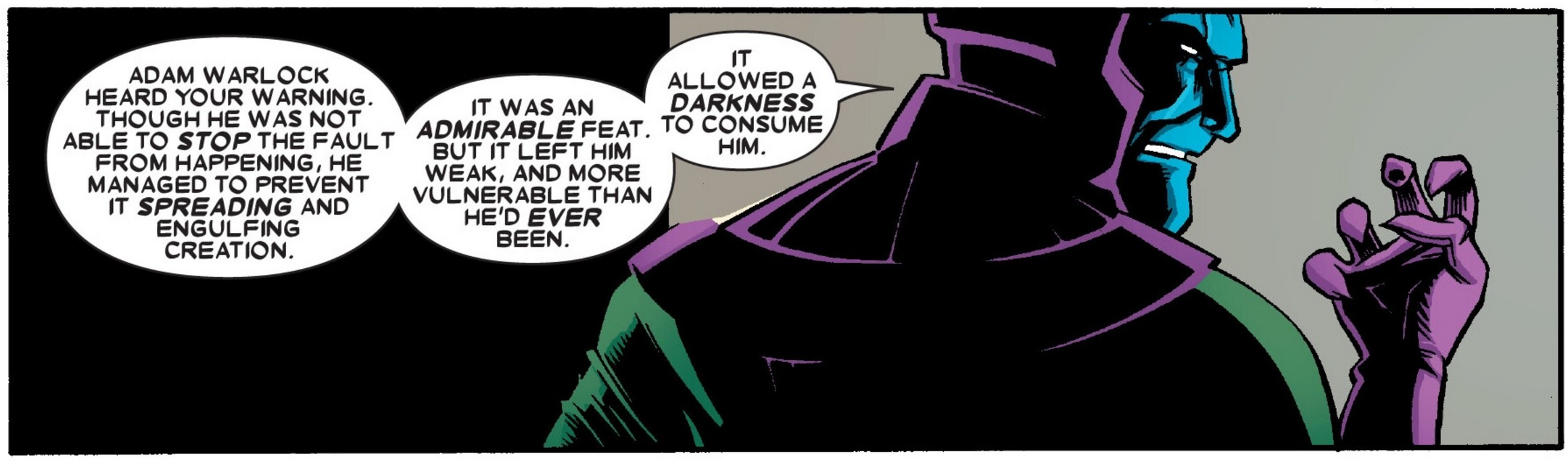
STAR-LORD OF 2009, I AM *KANG* OF ALL-WHEN.
YOU WILL CALL ME *KANG THE CONQUEROR.*
AND YOU WILL COME WITH ME IF YOU WISH TO SURVIVE THIS.
SECONDS OUT

OHMIGOD.
WHERE ARE WE GOING?
LIMBO. MY DWELLING PLACE.
STOP ASKING QUESTIONS. I WILL TELL YOU WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW.
THERE ISN'T TIME FOR ANYTHING ELSE. NOT *ANYWHERE*.

SO, MR. CONQUEROR, WHAT'S WITH THE FLOCK OF STARHAWKS?

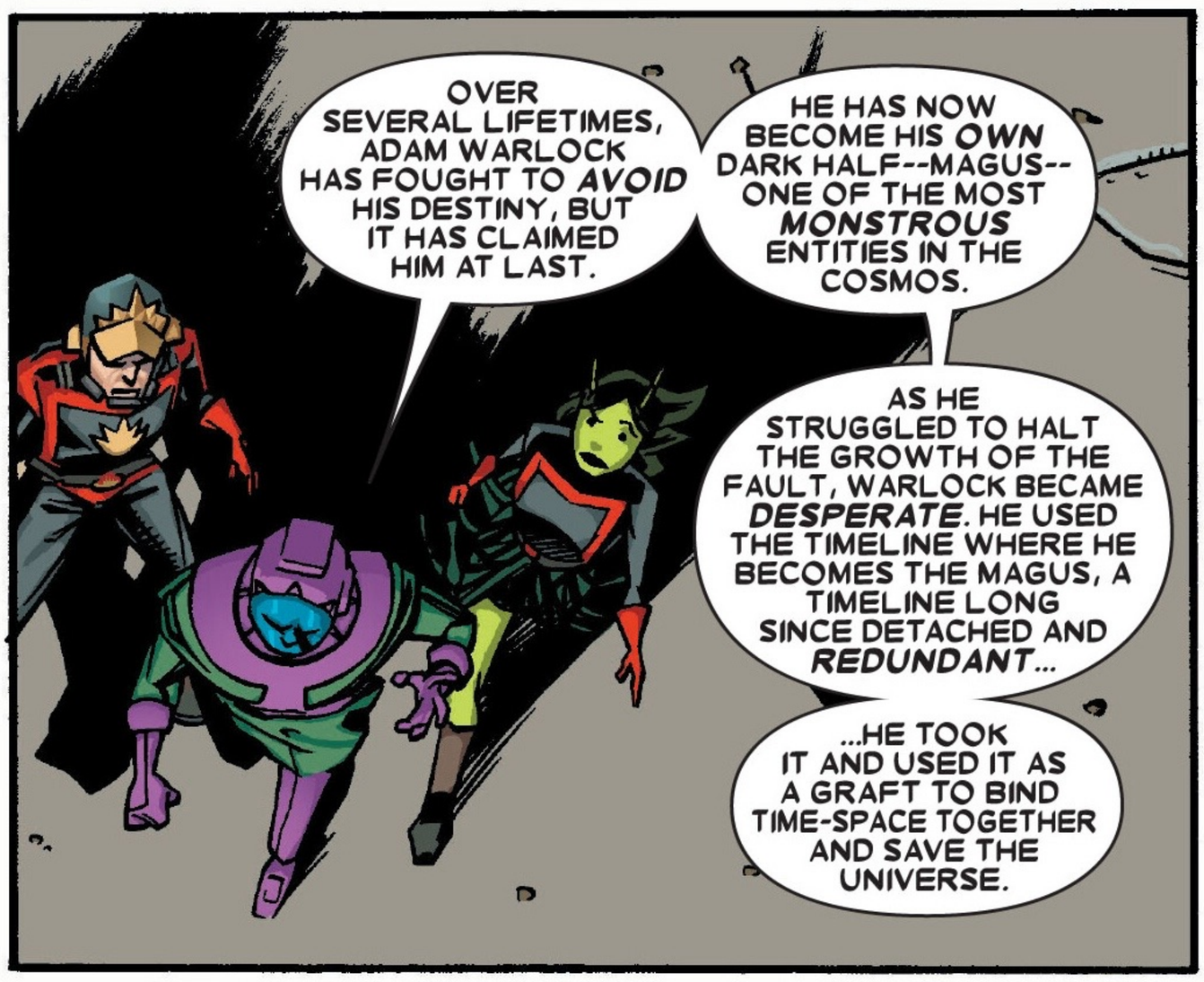
EACH ONE IS THE SURVIVOR OF A DOOMED OR LOST TIMESTREAM.
I HAVE COLLECTED THEM TO HELP ME PROSECUTE THIS *TEMPORAL CONFLICT.*
SO MY MESSAGE TO THE REST OF MY TEAM NEVER GOT THROUGH, TO THE PAST? THE FAULT WAS NEVER STOPPED?
NO. YOU *SUCCEEDED.*
YOU PREVENTED THE EVER-SPREADING FAULT FROM OBLITERATING ALL LIFE.

THEN WHAT IS ALL THIS ABOUT?
NOTHING EVER COMES WITHOUT A *PRICE,* STAR-LORD OF 2009.
ELIMINATE *ONE* THREAT, AND *ANOTHER* TAKES ITS PLACE. IT'S THE ONE CONSTANT OF THE UNIVERSAL LAWS.

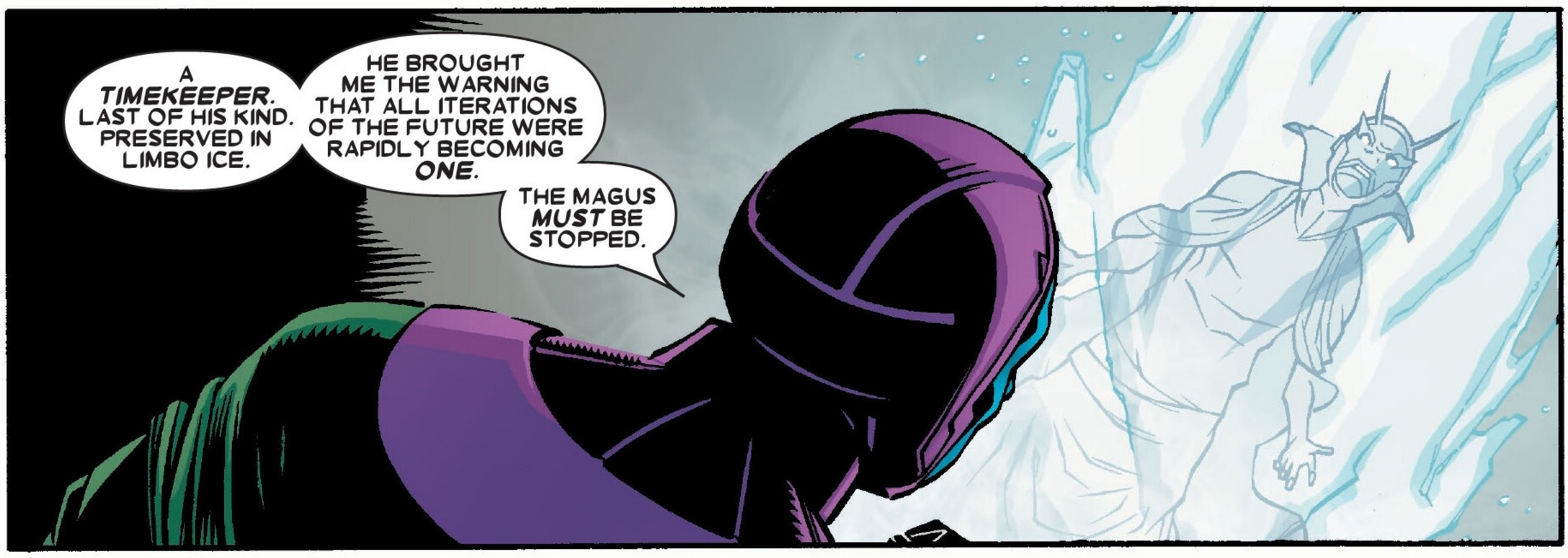

ADAM WARLOCK HEARD YOUR WARNING. THOUGH HE WAS NOT ABLE TO *STOP* THE FAULT FROM HAPPENING, HE MANAGED TO PREVENT IT *SPREADING* AND ENGULFING CREATION.
IT WAS AN *ADMIRABLE* FEAT. BUT IT LEFT HIM WEAK, AND MORE VULNERABLE THAN HE'D *EVER* BEEN.
IT ALLOWED A *DARKNESS* TO CONSUME HIM.

HE IS NOW THE MAGUS.
QUITE SO, MANTIS. IT IS AGREEABLE TO SEE YOU AGAIN.

ENCOUNTERS WITH YOU, CONQUEROR, ARE ALWAYS FAR MORE THAN SIMPLY "AGREEABLE."
YOU TWO HAVE A HISTORY?
I AM OF ALL-WHEN. I HAVE A HISTORY--AND A FUTURE--WITH EVERYONE.

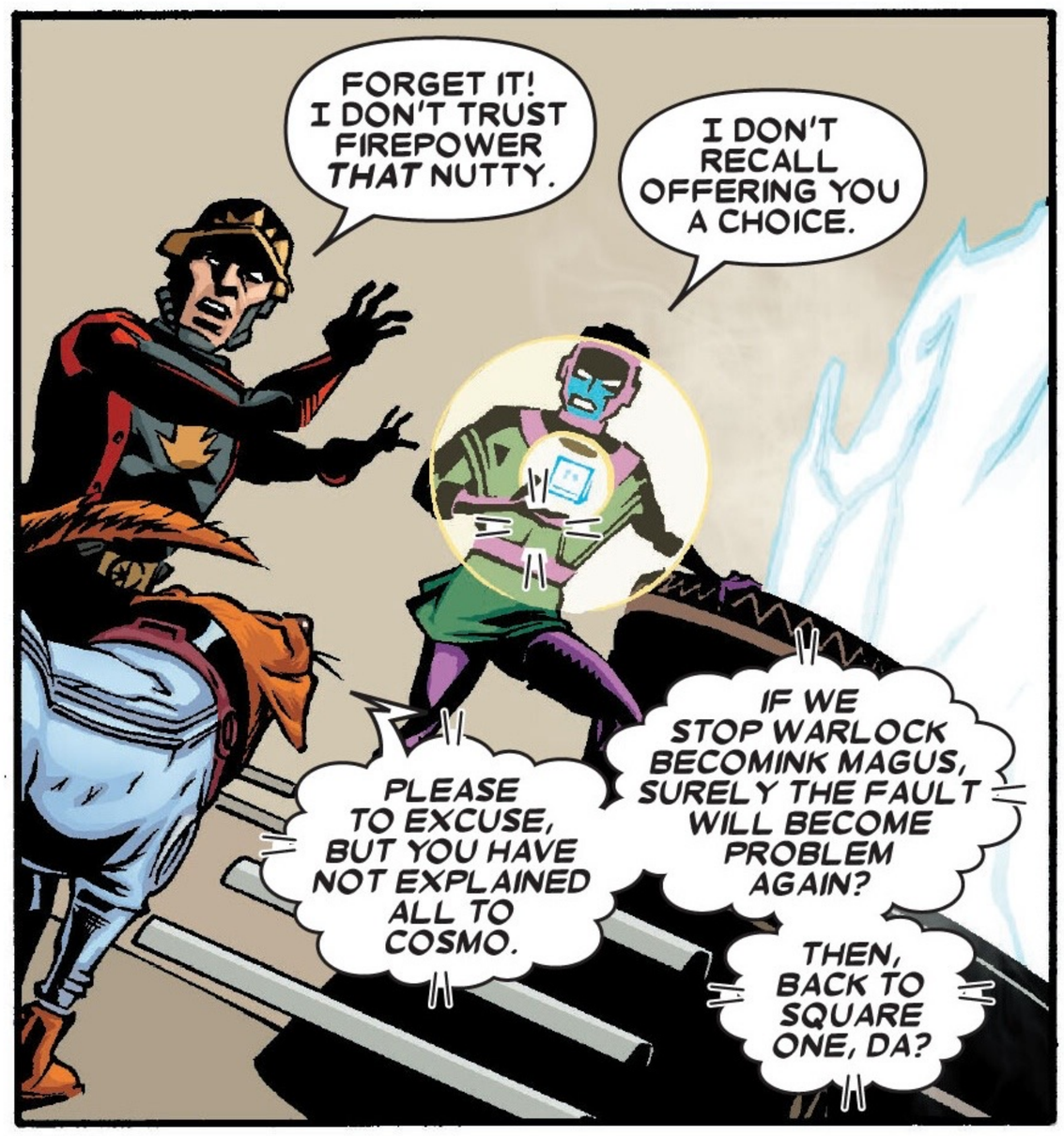

OVER SEVERAL LIFETIMES, ADAM WARLOCK HAS FOUGHT TO AVOID HIS DESTINY, BUT IT HAS CLAIMED HIM AT LAST.
HE HAS NOW BECOME HIS OWN DARK HALF--MAGUS--ONE OF THE MOST MONSTROUS ENTITIES IN THE COSMOS.
AS HE STRUGGLED TO HALT THE GROWTH OF THE FAULT, WARLOCK BECAME DESPERATE. HE USED THE TIMELINE WHERE HE BECOMES THE MAGUS, A TIMELINE LONG SINCE DETACHED AND REDUNDANT...
...HE TOOK IT AND USED IT AS A GRAFT TO BIND TIME-SPACE TOGETHER AND SAVE THE UNIVERSE.

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
THE TIMELINE WHERE MAGUS RULES AS HEAD OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH OF TRUTH IS INCREDIBLY PERNICIOUS AND STRONG...LIKE AN INFESTING WEED.
THE FUTURE SHOULD BE MULTIFARIOUS AND FULL OF POSSIBILITIES. BUT ALL FUTURES--ONE BY ONE, EVERY STRAND OF POSSIBILITY--IS BECOMING THE MAGUS FUTURE.
WHEN I RESCUED YOU, YOU HAD ARRIVED IN ONE YOURSELF.


A TIMEKEEPER. LAST OF HIS KIND. PRESERVED IN LIMBO ICE.
HE BROUGHT ME THE WARNING THAT ALL ITERATIONS OF THE FUTURE WERE RAPIDLY BECOMING ONE.
THE MAGUS MUST BE STOPPED.

MAGUS CONTROLS SO *MUCH* OF THE TIME-STREAM THAT IF I MOVE *DIRECTLY* AGAINST HIM, HE WILL SEE ME COMING.
BUT YOU ARE *ANOMALIES*, UNTETHERED IN TIME. I INTEND TO SEND YOU BACK, *THROUGH* HIS DEFENSES, TO THE POINT OF HIS CREATION.
TO DO *WHAT?*

STOP HIM WITH *THIS*.
A *COSMIC CUBE!*
THE *LAST* ONE. I'VE CALIBRATED IT TO ASSIST YOU.


FORGET IT! I DON'T TRUST FIREPOWER *THAT* NUTTY.
I DON'T RECALL OFFERING YOU A CHOICE.
PLEASE TO EXCUSE, BUT YOU HAVE NOT EXPLAINED ALL TO COSMO.
IF WE STOP WARLOCK BECOMINK MAGUS, SURELY THE FAULT WILL BECOME PROBLEM AGAIN?
THEN, BACK TO SQUARE ONE, DA?

I HAVE CALCULATED THAT THERE IS A VERY SMALL WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY...JUST A MATTER OF *SECONDS*.
WARLOCK SEALS THE FAULT. LESS THAN A MINUTE LATER, HE *BECOMES* THE MAGUS.
THAT IS WHEN YOU STRIKE.

AND DO WHAT? LIKE PETER ASK, WHAT ARE YOU SUGGESTINK WE DO?
WHATEVER IT TAKES TO SAVE THE UNIVERSE.

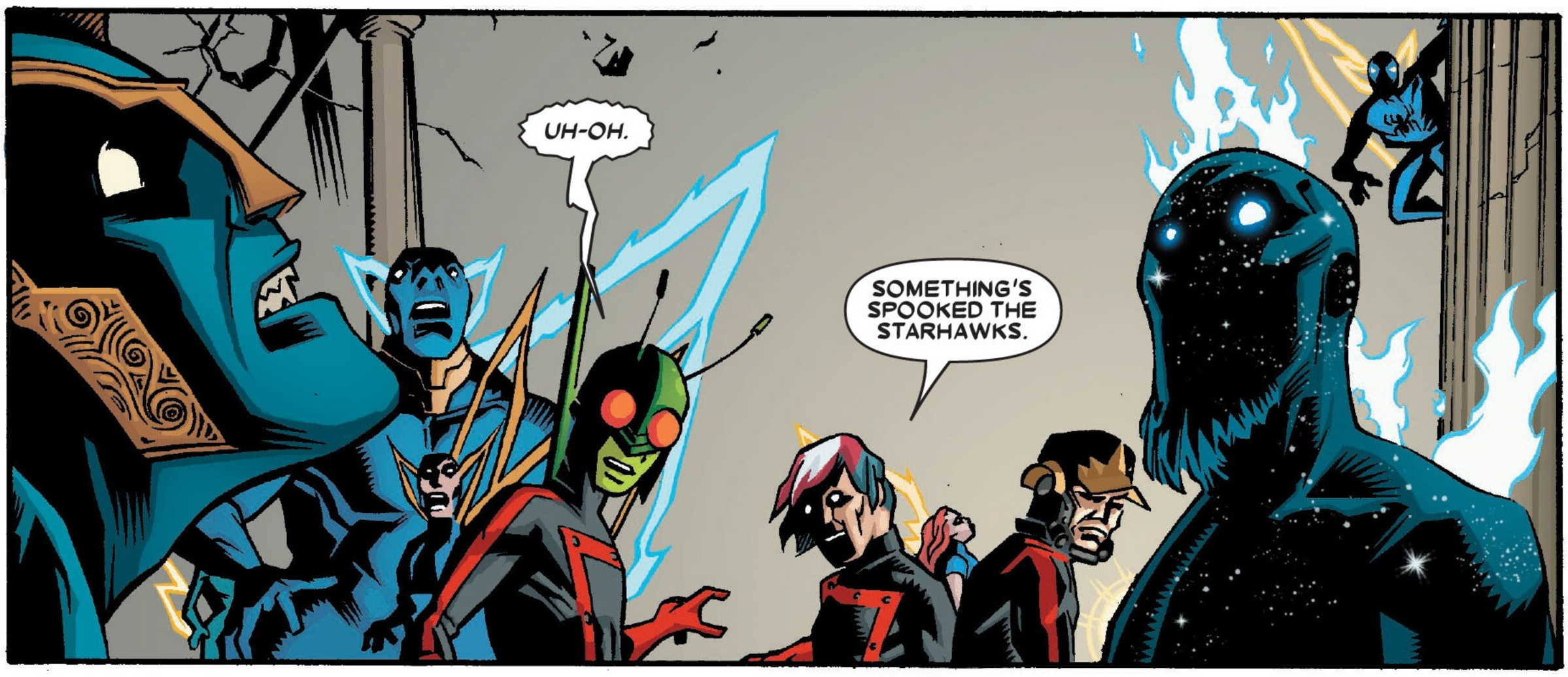
WHAT? LIKE *KILL* ADAM?
I'M *NOT* GOING TO KILL ADAM.
WHATEVER IT TAKES.
YOU WILL DO *WHATEVER IT TAKES.*

WHEN YOU ARRIVE, THE CUBE WILL ACTIVATE A LOCAL *TIME FLOW HIATUS.*
THAT TINY WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY WILL STRETCH TO FIVE MINUTES. *TEN*, IF YOU'RE LUCKY.
BUT THAT'S *ALL* THE TIME I CAN GIVE YOU.

OF COURSE, KANG THE CONQUEROR IS...A *CONQUEROR.*
HE IS A NOTORIOUS AND *RUTHLESS* FIGURE, A PLUNDERER OF EPOCHS. A FOE OF THE AVENGERS.
HIS MIND IS SHIELDED FROM ME. SO I CANNOT TELL YOU IF HE SPEAKS THE *TRUTH* OR AN ELABORATE *LIE*. A *SCHEME* ON HIS PART.

IF YOU REFUSE TO ACT, THE MAGUS WILL BE *EVERYWHERE*. HE WILL BE *EVERYTHING*. HE WILL BE *EVERYWHEN*.
LET'S SEE, SHALL WE? LET'S SEE WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU QUESTION MY MOTIVES AND *WASTE TIME?*

...
WELL, THIS IS--TIK!--AWKWARD...
QUIET! WAIT...


UH-OH.
SOMETHING'S SPOOKED THE STARHAWKS.

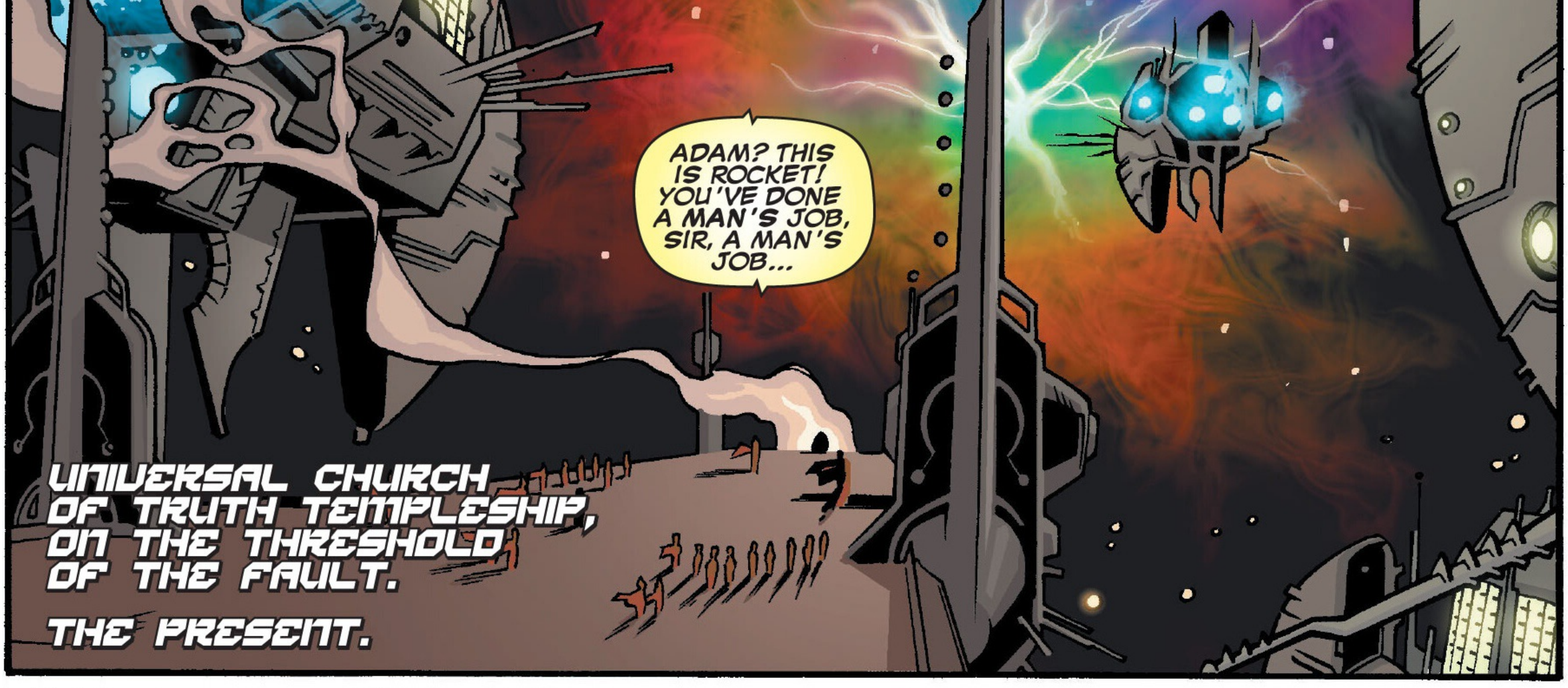
THEY HAVE *FOUND* US!
THE *BELIEF ENGINES* HAVE CRACKED THE WALLS OF LIMBO!
IT IS THE TWILIGHT OF THE FINAL DAY!
AND THE NAME OF ADAM MAGUS IS *ARMAGEDDON!*
I AM THE ONE WHO KNOWS!

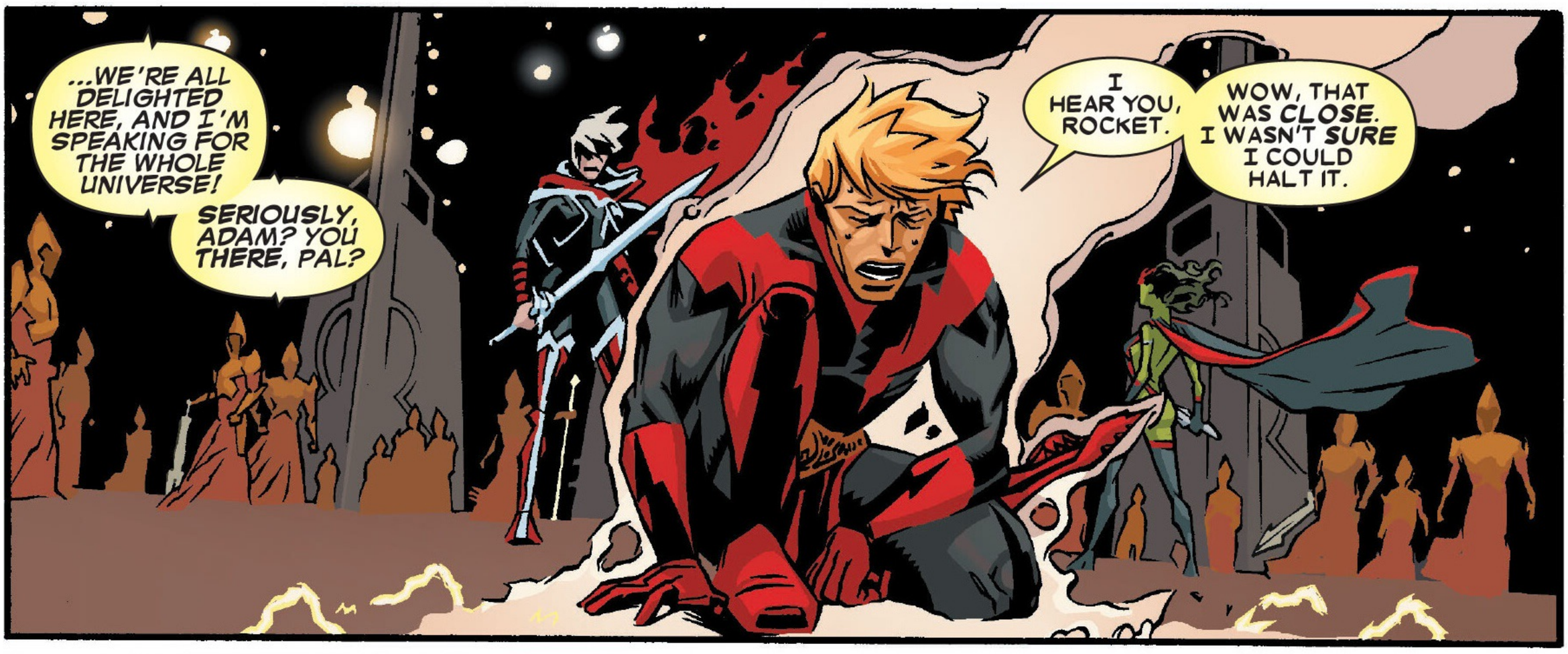
FTOOMMMCHH
THERE'S THE *PROOF* YOU WANTED, MANTIS!
CONVINCED NOW?!

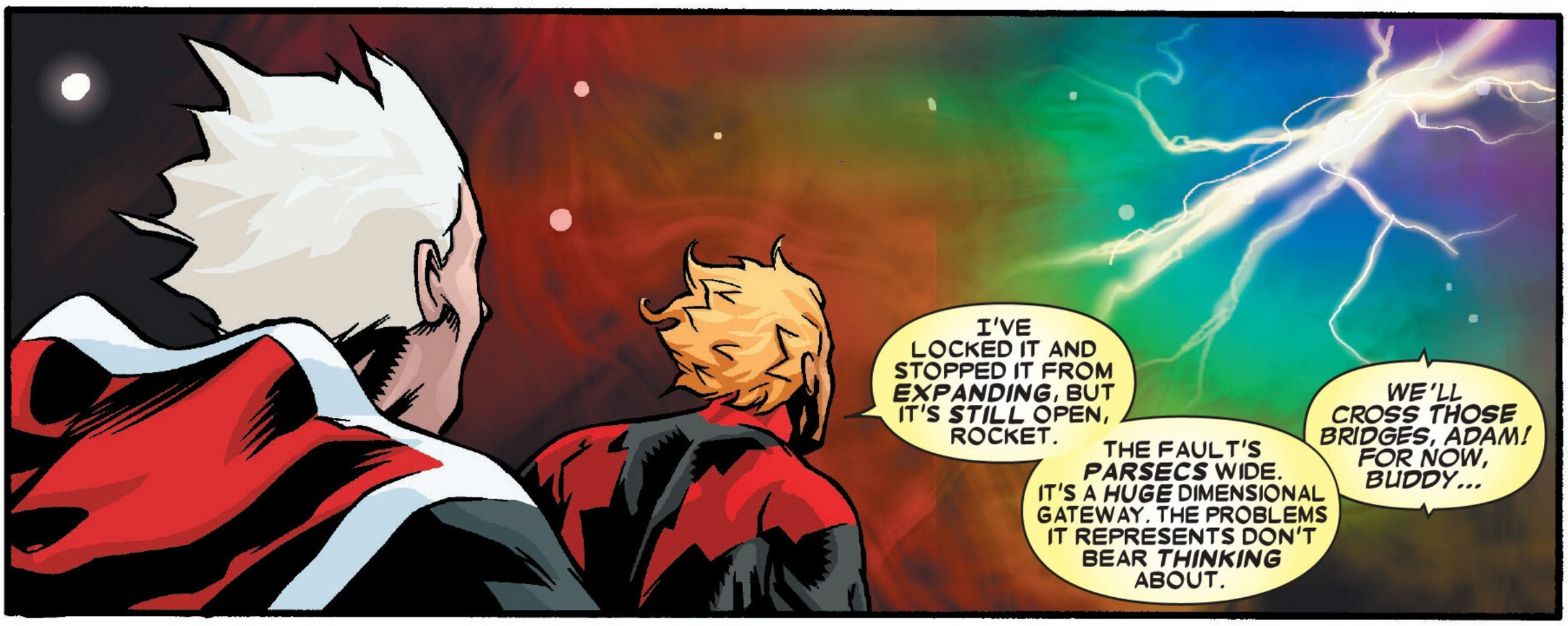
I BELIEVE!
SLAY ALL HERETICS WHO OPPOSE THE MAGUS!
PROTECT THE CONQUEROR!

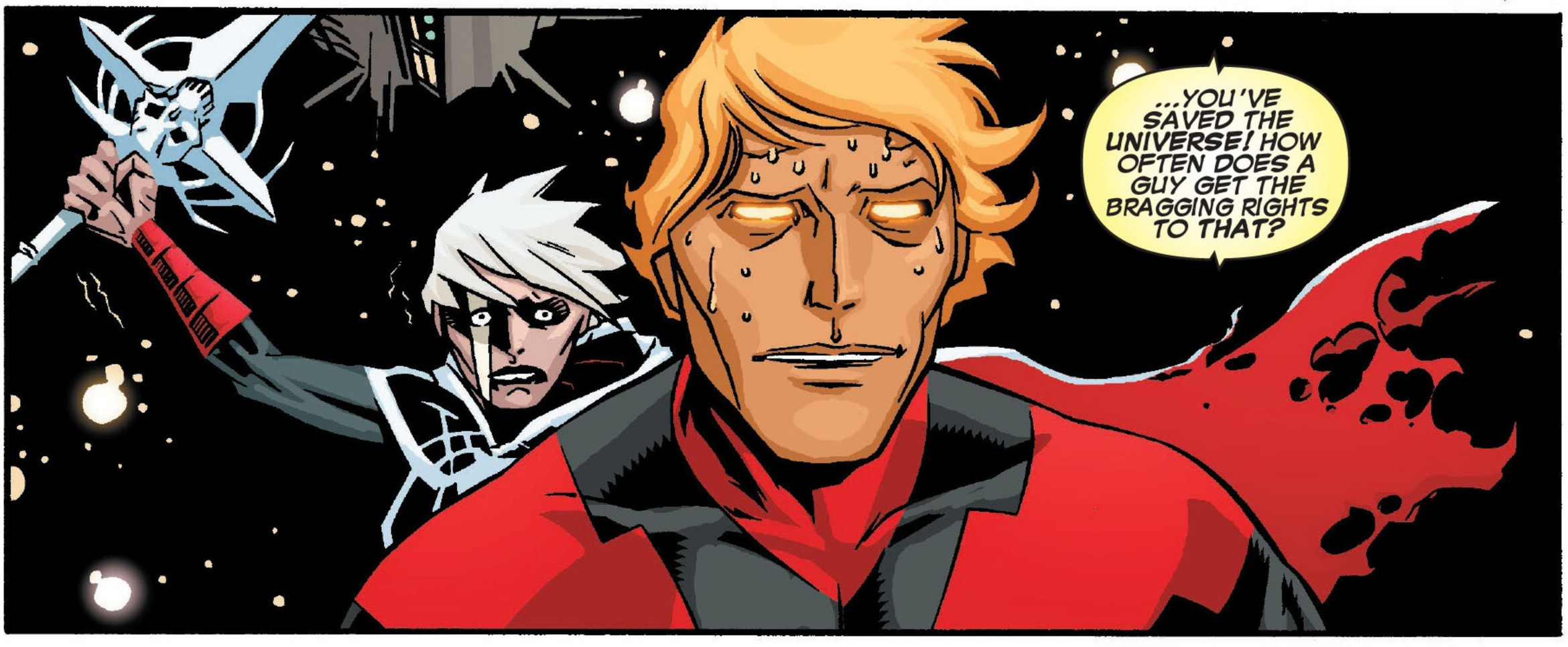
STARHAWKS! PREPARE TO INITIATE TACTICAL WITHDRAWAL K-681! WE'RE ABANDONING THIS POSITION!
STAR-LORD OF 2009! IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO LEAVE!

DO NOT DISAPPOINT ME!
KANG! DON'T YOU--


ADAM? THIS IS ROCKET! YOU'VE DONE A MAN'S JOB, SIR, A MAN'S JOB...
UNIVERSAL CHURCH OF TRUTH TEMPLESHIP, ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE FAULT.
THE PRESENT.


...WE'RE ALL DELIGHTED HERE, AND I'M SPEAKING FOR THE WHOLE UNIVERSE!
SERIOUSLY, ADAM? YOU THERE, PAL?
I HEAR YOU, ROCKET.
WOW, THAT WAS CLOSE. I WASN'T SURE I COULD HALT IT.


I'VE LOCKED IT AND STOPPED IT FROM EXPANDING, BUT IT'S STILL OPEN, ROCKET.
THE FAULT'S PARSECS WIDE. IT'S A HUGE DIMENSIONAL GATEWAY. THE PROBLEMS IT REPRESENTS DON'T BEAR THINKING ABOUT.
WE'LL CROSS THOSE BRIDGES, ADAM! FOR NOW, BUDDY...


...YOU'VE SAVED THE UNIVERSE! HOW OFTEN DOES A GUY GET THE BRAGGING RIGHTS TO THAT?

QUILL? WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?
I'LL EXPLAIN LATER, GAMORA.
PHYLA... WHAT THE HELL WERE YOU GOING TO DO?

IT'S RIGHT THERE IN HER MIND, TOO RAW TO HIDE. TO GET MOONDRAGON BACK, SHE MADE A PACT WITH OBLIVION.
HE TOLD HER SHE HAD TO KILL THE AVATAR OF LIFE, AND THAT SHE'D KNOW WHAT TO DO WHEN THE MOMENT AROSE.
GET OUT OF MY HEAD, MANTIS!
I HAVE TO DO THIS! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT ADAM IS GOING TO BECOME!
HEY? IS THAT PETE'S VOICE? WHAT'S GOING ON THERE?

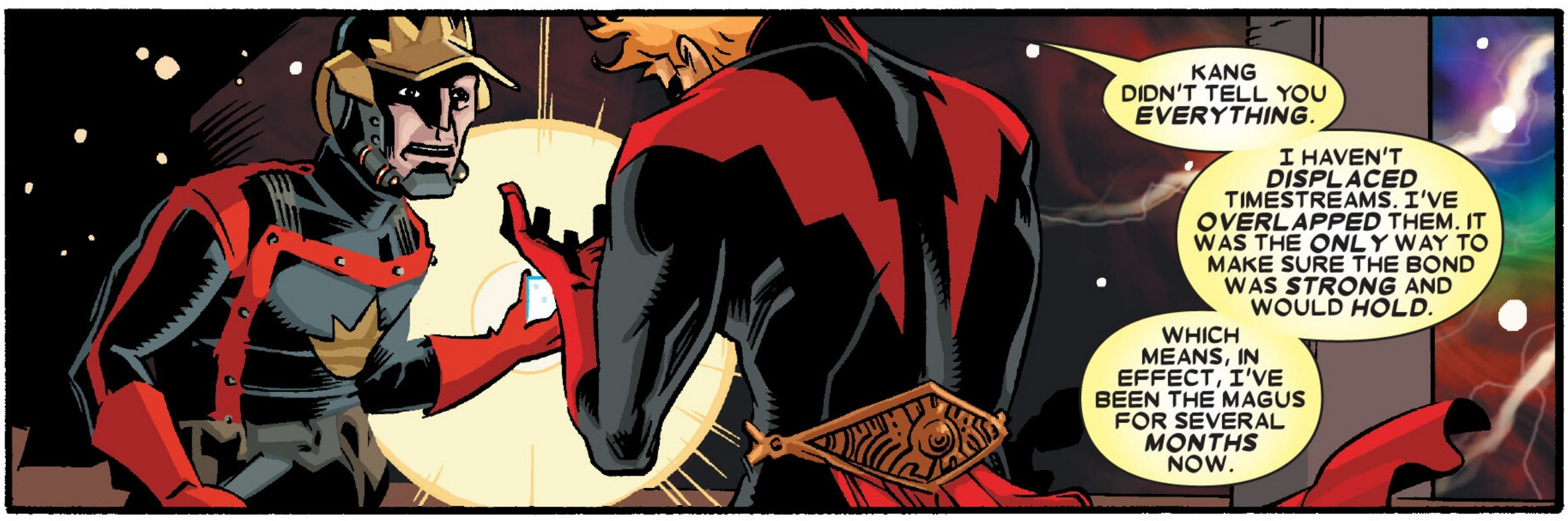
YOU INSANE WITCH!
OH, PLEASE! YOU KNOW WHAT HE'S CAPABLE OF MORE THAN ANYONE!
WHOA! WHOA! STEP BACK!
ADAM? PHYLA'S RIGHT, ISN'T SHE?
WE'VE COME A LONG WAY TO BE HERE. WE LEARNED SOME BAD THINGS ALONG THE WAY.

YEAH? MAYBE YOU COULD SHARE THEM WITH US, PETE.
WE'RE RIGHT DOWN TO THE WIRE HERE, ROCKY. LAST CALL, NO SECOND CHANCES.
PZZZAM

THIS FREAKY GLOWING CUBE IS PUTTING TIME ON HOLD. IT'S BUYING US JUST A COUPLE OF MINUTES.
A COUPLE OF MINUTES TO PUT DESTINY RIGHT.
OKAY, ADAM?

IT'S NOT TOO LATE. IT'S NOT, OKAY?
ADAM, YOU'VE JUST DONE THE MOST AMAZING THING. YOU'VE SAVED... EVERYTHING!
DON'T JUST THROW THAT AWAY!
I'M JUST SO TIRED. AND IT'S LIKE A BLACK TIDE IN MY HEAD THAT I CAN'T HOLD BACK.

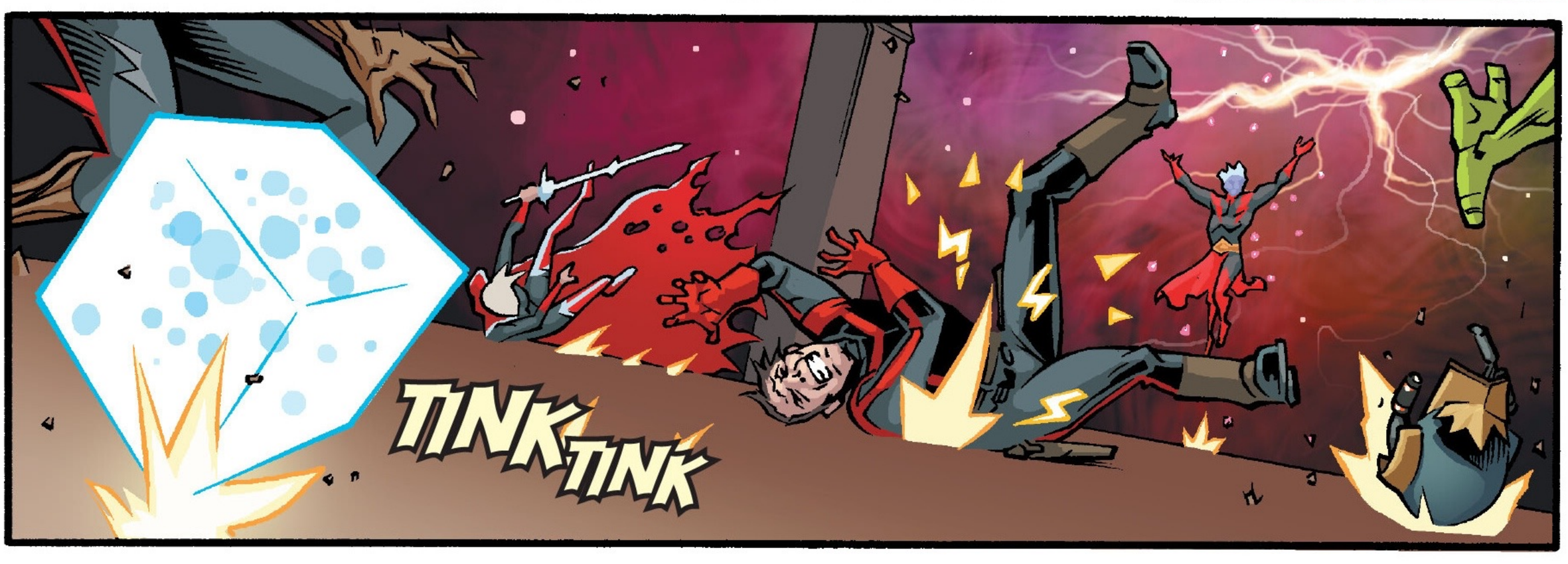
FIGHT IT, ADAM! YOU CAN FIGHT THE MAGUS OFF AND YOU CAN KEEP HIM OUT!
KANG TOLD ME THIS, KANG THE CONQUEROR HIMSELF! THERE'S STILL A CHANCE TO DENY THAT DESTINY!
A SPLIT SECOND CHANCE, RIGHT NOW! BUT YOU'VE GOT TO BE STRONG!
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, PETER...


KANG DIDN'T TELL YOU EVERYTHING.
I HAVEN'T DISPLACED TIMESTREAMS. I'VE OVERLAPPED THEM. IT WAS THE ONLY WAY TO MAKE SURE THE BOND WAS STRONG AND WOULD HOLD.
WHICH MEANS, IN EFFECT, I'VE BEEN THE MAGUS FOR SEVERAL MONTHS NOW.

SHUT UP. THAT'S NOT TRUE. SHUT UP!
FIGHT IT, ADAM. DON'T MAKE ME...
WHAT? KILL ME?

YOU COULDN'T KILL ME IF YOU *TRIED*.

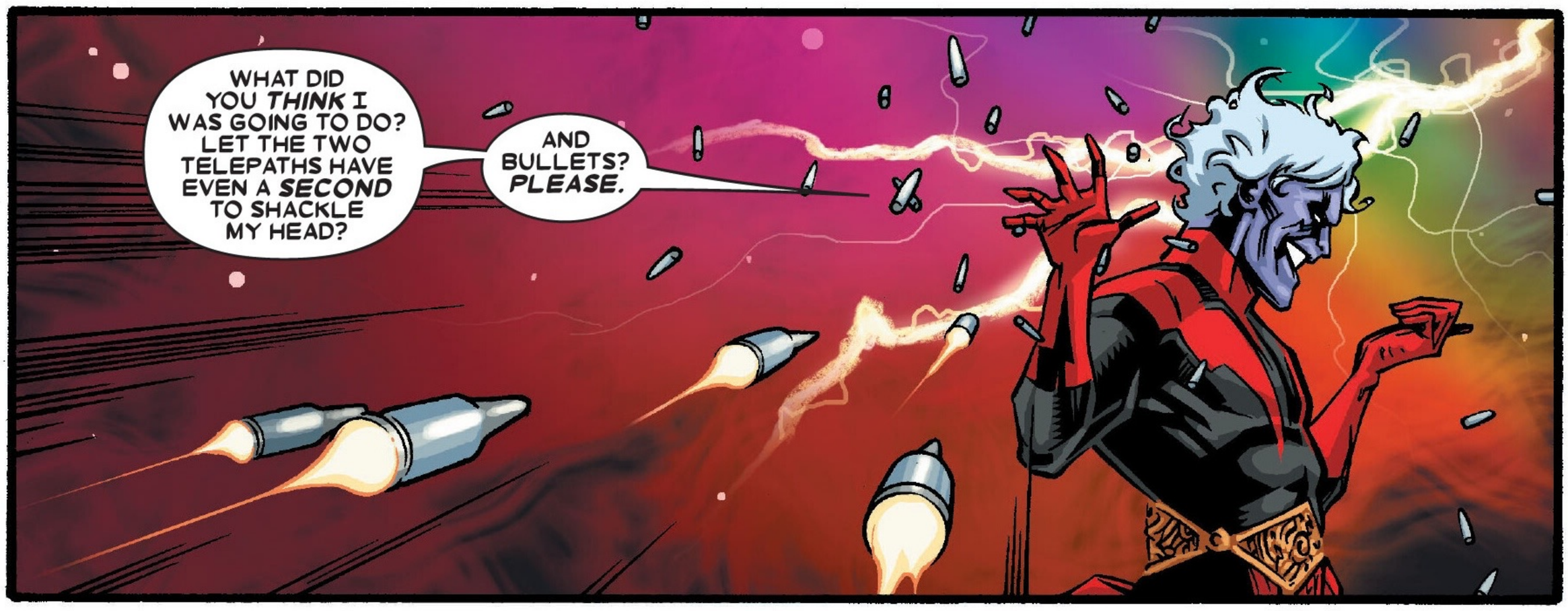
SHA-POOM
UGHHN!


TINK TINK

COSMO, REINFORCE MY MIND *QUICKLY!*
WE CAN BLOCK HIS THOUGHTS AND PREVENT HIM FROM--

MANTIS! COSMO! WHAT'S THE--TIK!--MATTER WITH YOU?

HOLY-- THEY'RE *DEAD!* ROCKY, THEY'RE JUST--*TIK!*-- *DEAD!*
OH YOU SUNOVA--

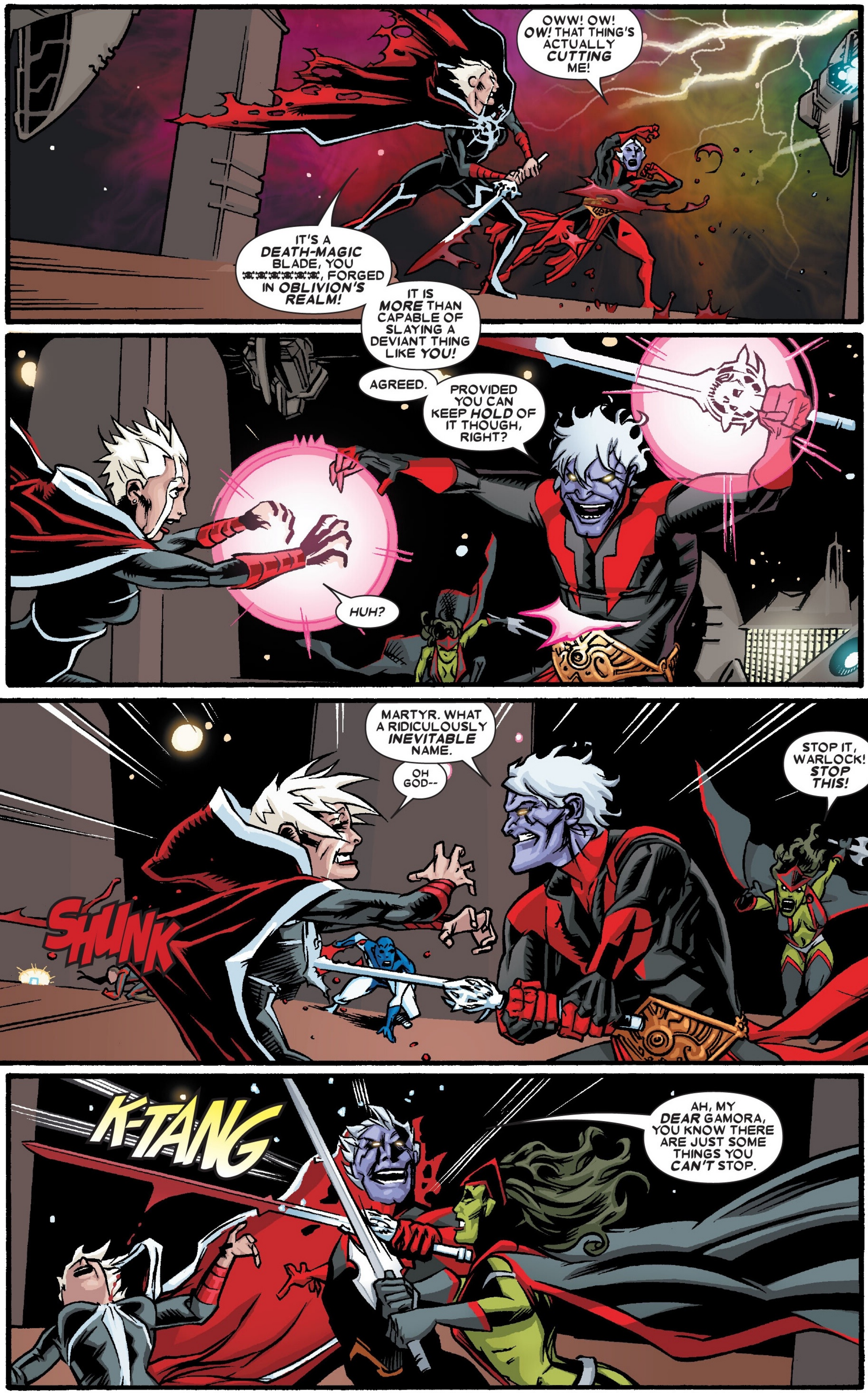

WHAT DID YOU *THINK* I WAS GOING TO DO? LET THE TWO TELEPATHS HAVE EVEN A *SECOND* TO SHACKLE MY HEAD?
AND BULLETS? *PLEASE.*

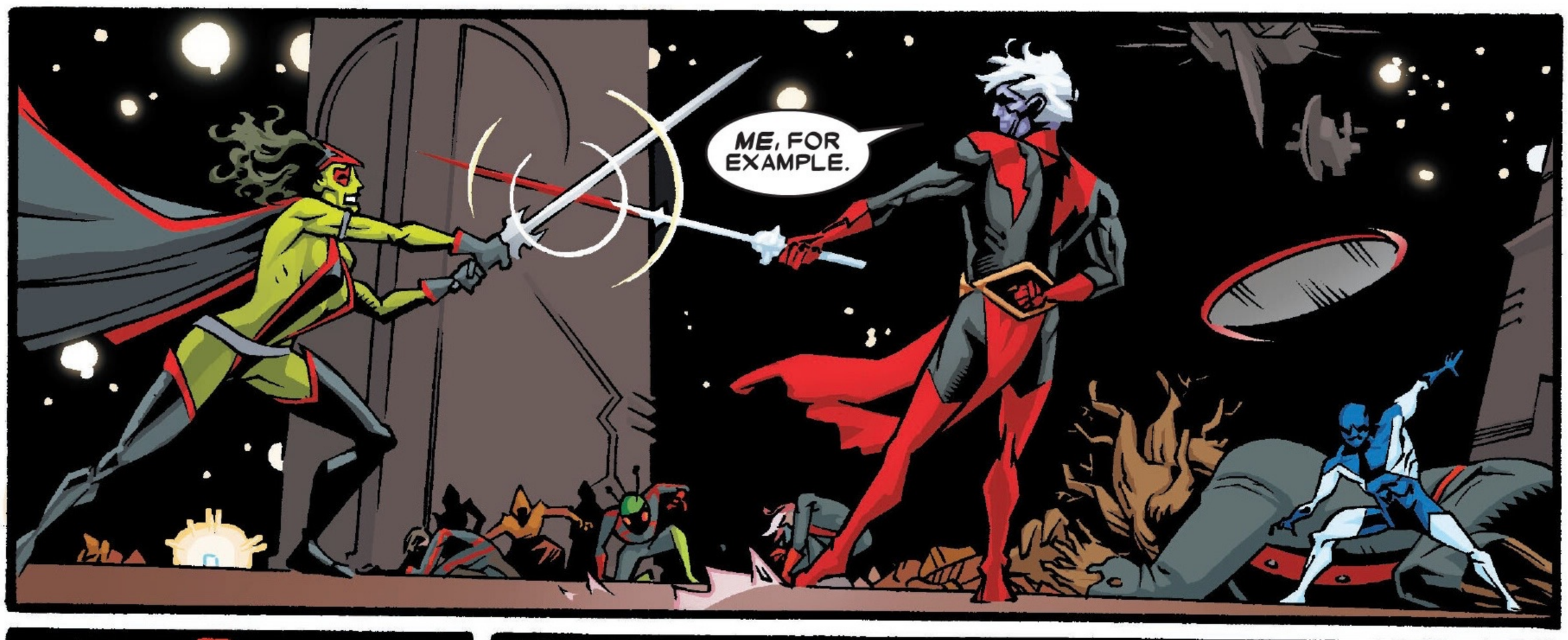
UGHHN!
÷TIIIK!÷

MFF--!
I AM GROOT!

NO, YOU ARE *FLAMMABLE*.
FIRST *BULLETS*, THEN *WOOD*. FOR COSMIC SUPER HEROES, YOU'RE NOT VERY *HIGH TECH*.
I AM GROOOOGHH!

MONSTER!
GAAH!
OKAY. LET'S TRY *SWORDS* NOW, SHALL WE?

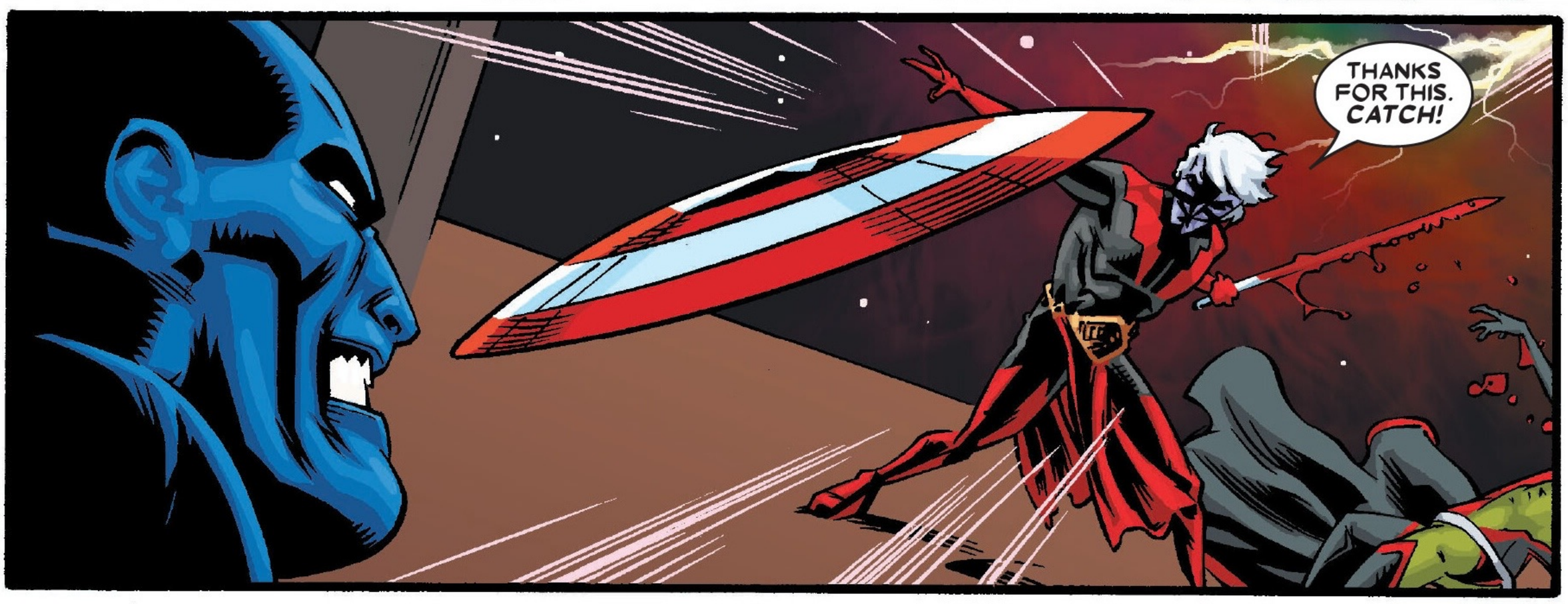

OWW! OW! OW! THAT THING'S ACTUALLY CUTTING ME!
IT'S A DEATH-MAGIC BLADE, YOU ****, FORGED IN OBLIVION'S REALM!
IT IS MORE THAN CAPABLE OF SLAYING A DEVIANT THING LIKE YOU!
AGREED.
PROVIDED YOU CAN KEEP HOLD OF IT THOUGH, RIGHT?
HUH?
MARTYR. WHAT A RIDICULOUSLY INEVITABLE NAME.
OH GOD--
STOP IT, WARLOCK! STOP THIS!
SHUNK
K-TANG
AH, MY DEAR GAMORA, YOU KNOW THERE ARE JUST SOME THINGS YOU CAN'T STOP.


ME, FOR EXAMPLE.

FAP

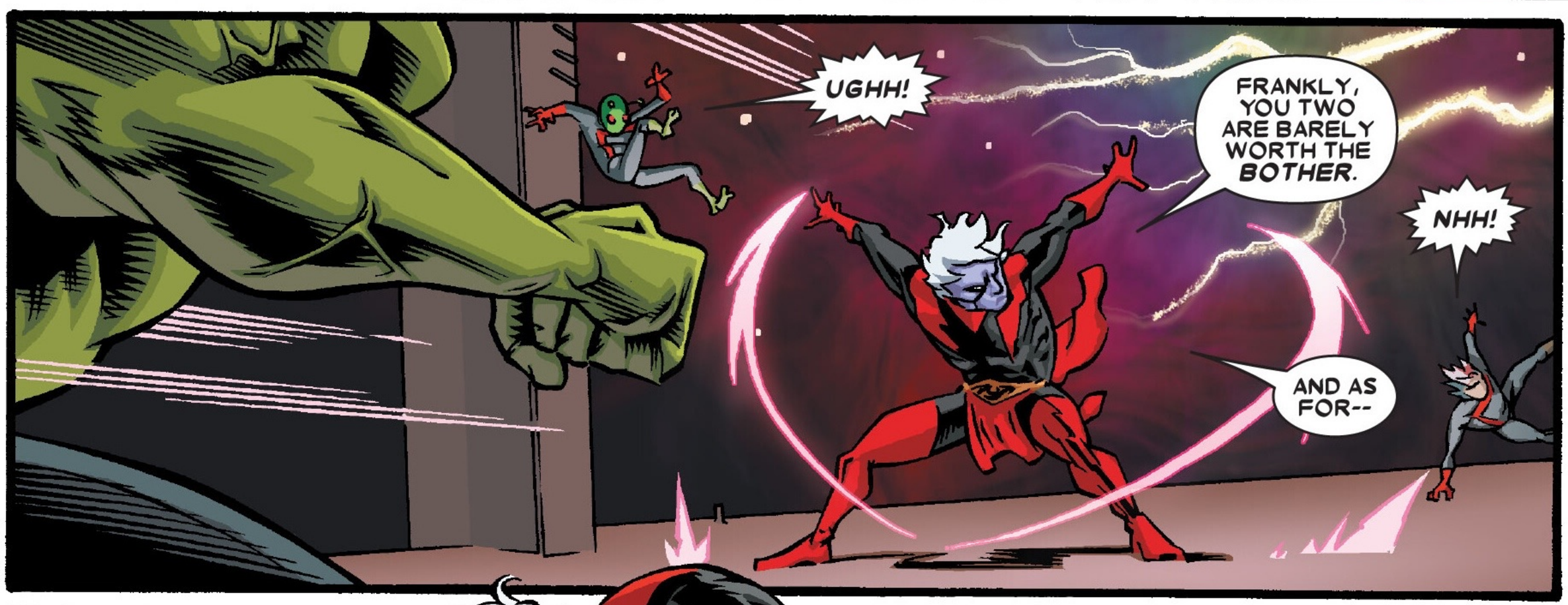
SKNNGG

BYE BYE, GAMMY.
CHHUKK

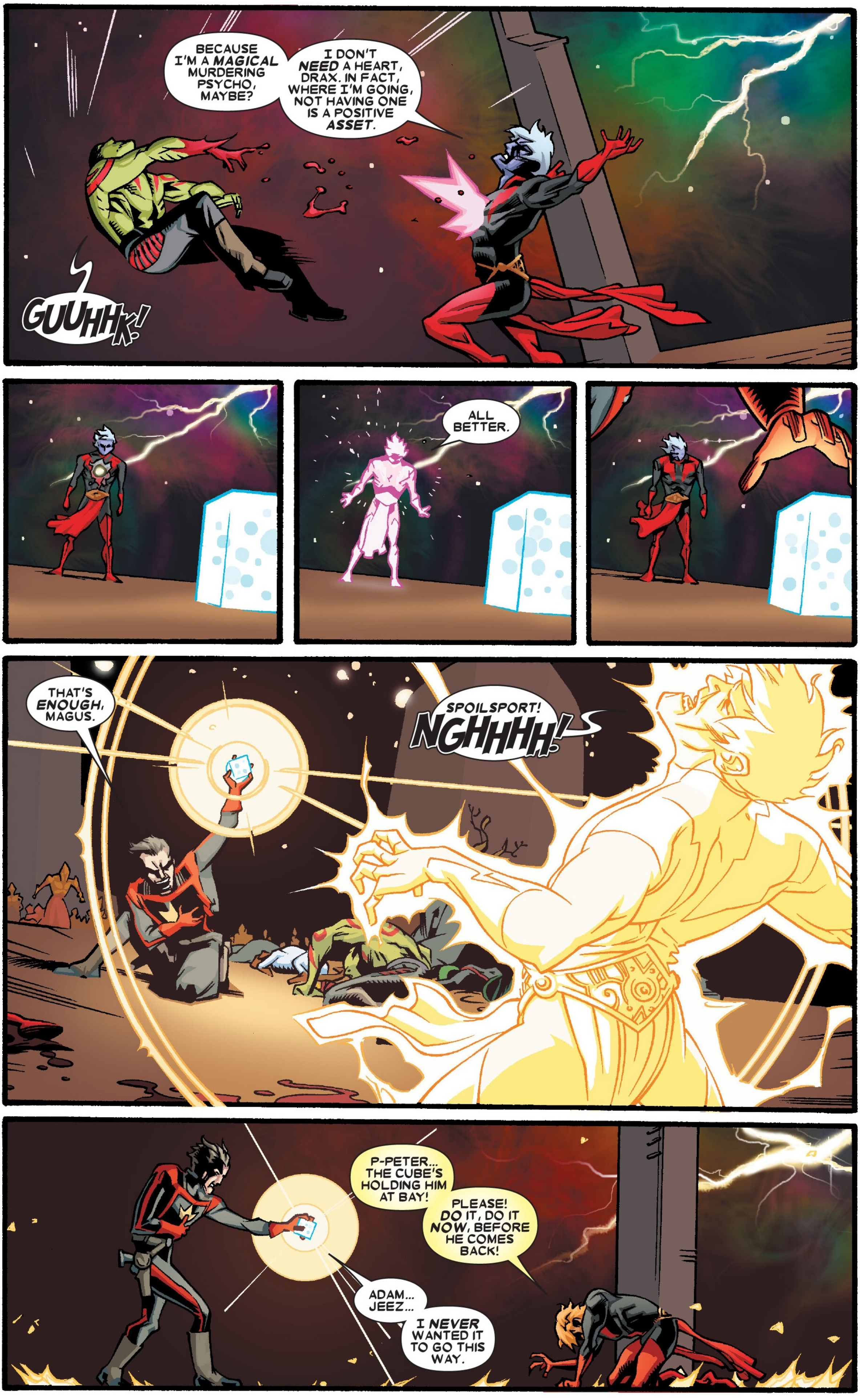

THANKS FOR THIS. CATCH!

SHNNK
DAAAH!
OH JEEZ--! MY CONTAINMENT SUIT!

WHRRSSH
WHO'S NEXT?


UGHH!
FRANKLY, YOU TWO ARE BARELY WORTH THE BOTHER.
NHH!
AND AS FOR--

--OH.
THIS IS HOW YOU KILLED THANOS, DRAX. TORE OUT HIS LIVING HEART.
WHY CHANGE A WINNING FORMULA, YOU MURDERING PSYCHO?

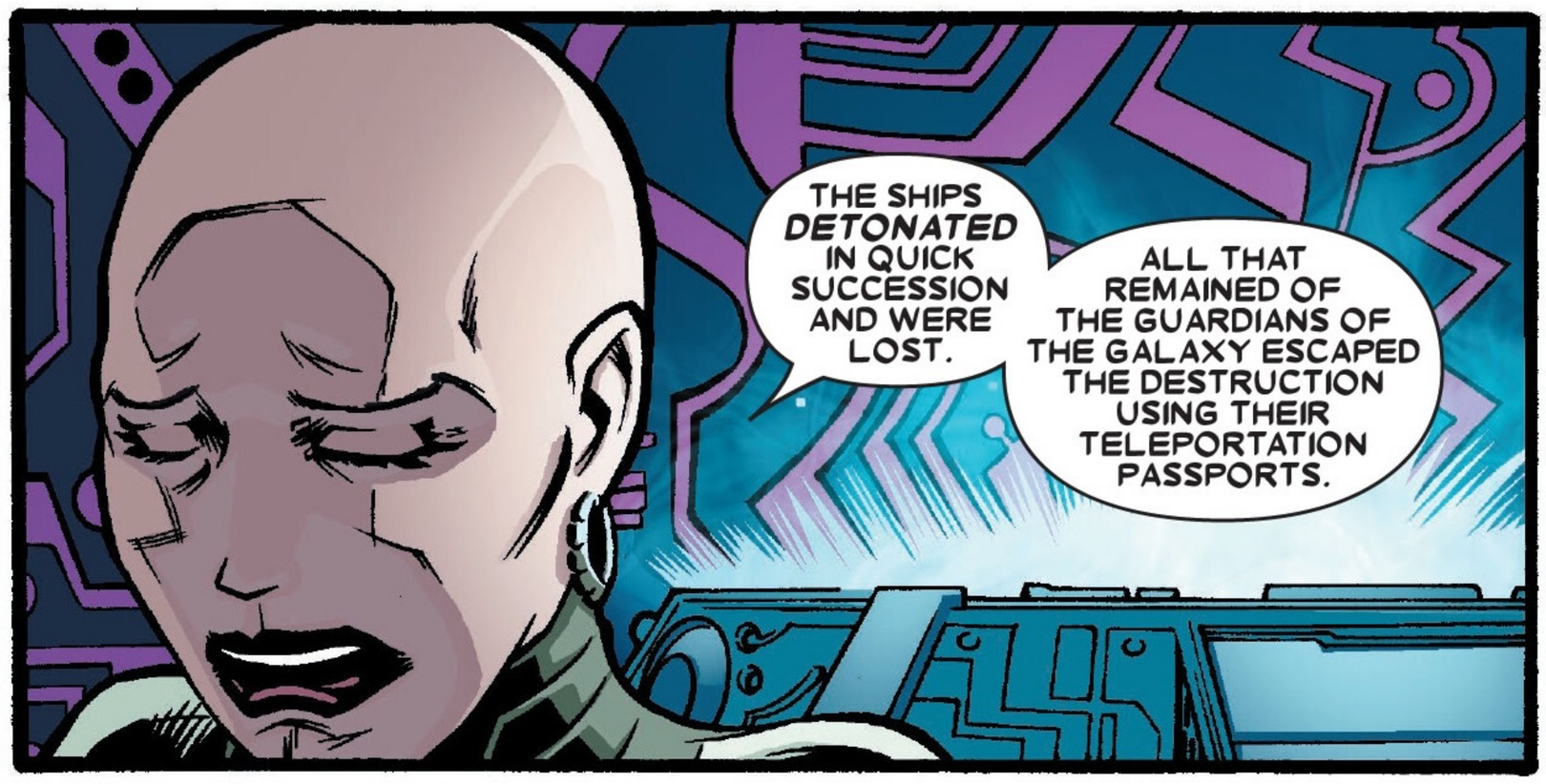

BECAUSE I'M A MAGICAL MURDERING PSYCHO, MAYBE?
I DON'T NEED A HEART, DRAX. IN FACT, WHERE I'M GOING, NOT HAVING ONE IS A POSITIVE ASSET.
GUUHHK!
ALL BETTER.
THAT'S ENOUGH, MAGUS.
SPOILSPORT!
NGHHHH!
P-PETER... THE CUBE'S HOLDING HIM AT BAY!
PLEASE! DO IT, DO IT NOW, BEFORE HE COMES BACK!
ADAM... JEEZ...
I NEVER WANTED IT TO GO THIS WAY.

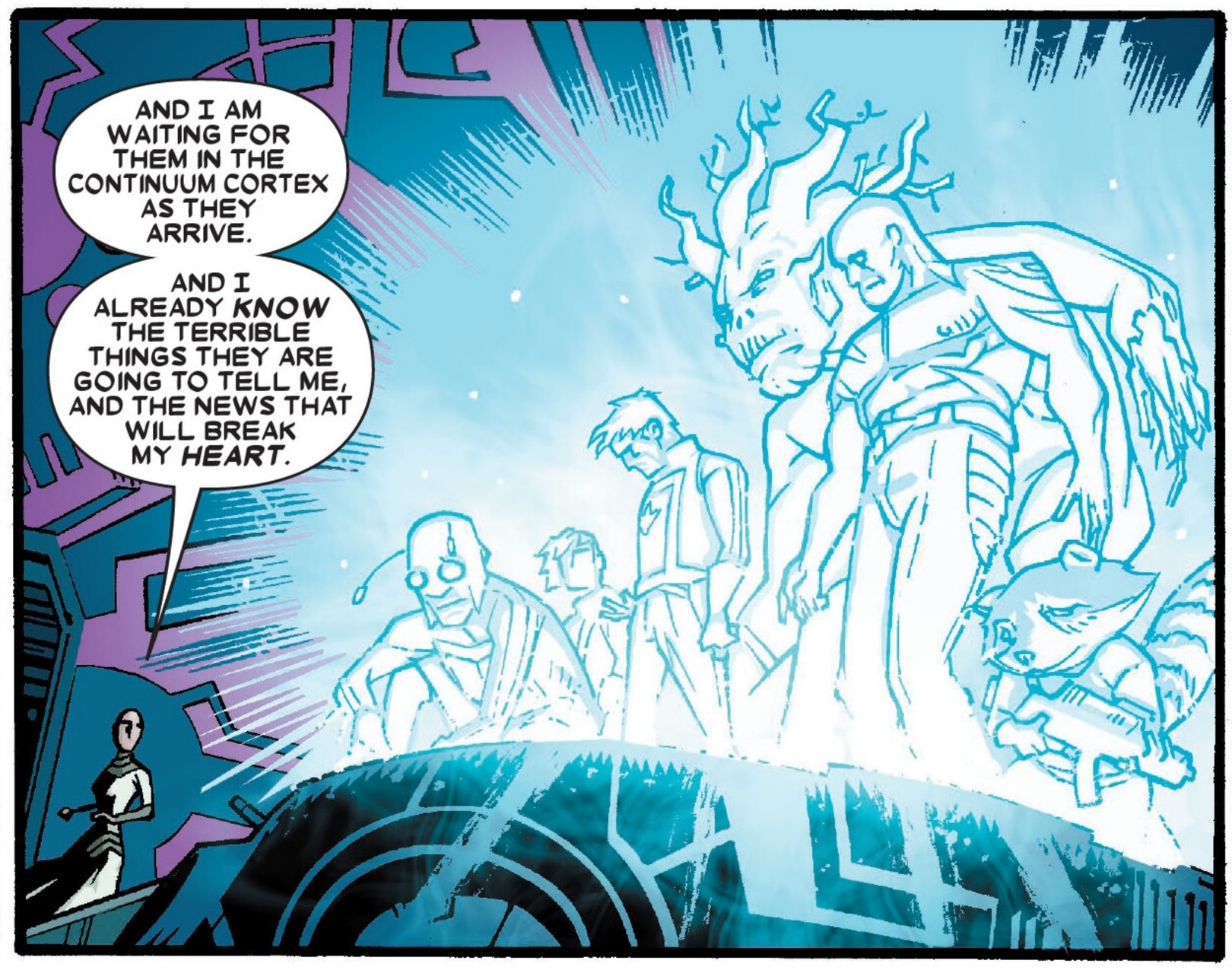
AND I DID? PLEASE, PETER, BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!

DEAR GOD.
WHATEVER IT TAKES.

KTOOM
LOOK WHAT YOU MADE ME DO, ADAM.
LOOK WHAT YOU MADE ME DO.

KNOWHERE.
"WHEN THE MAGUS DIED, THE CHURCH CARDINALS WENT *INSANE* IN THEIR GRIEF.
"THIS SET OFF A CHAIN REACTION IN THE *BELIEF FONT* POWERING THE TEMPLESHIP, AND IN THOSE NEARBY."


THE SHIPS *DETONATED* IN QUICK SUCCESSION AND WERE LOST.
ALL THAT REMAINED OF THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY ESCAPED THE DESTRUCTION USING THEIR TELEPORTATION PASSPORTS.


AND I AM WAITING FOR THEM IN THE CONTINUUM CORTEX AS THEY ARRIVE.
AND I ALREADY *KNOW* THE TERRIBLE THINGS THEY ARE GOING TO TELL ME, AND THE NEWS THAT WILL BREAK MY *HEART*.

HELLO, DAUGHTER. WE SAVED THE UNIVERSE AGAIN.

IT DIDN'T COME CHEAP.

WAR OF KINGS: WHO WILL RULE?

I GAZE UPON THE FAULT, A VAST PUNCTURE WOUND IN TIME AND SPACE.
IT IS SEVEN PARSECS ACROSS, SPLITTING THE BORDER BETWEEN THE KREE STELLAR EMPIRE AND THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM.
IT IS AN UNREGULATED POINT OF ENTRY INTO OUR UNIVERSE FOR BEINGS FROM OTHER DIMENSIONS. WHO KNOWS WHAT THREATS IT CONTAINS?
THE SHI'AR BLAME THE INHUMAN KING BLACK BOLT, NATURALLY. THE DETONATION OF HIS TERRIGEN BOMB TRIGGERED THE FAULT.
BUT HIS WEAPON WAS ONLY LAUNCHED IN THE PROSECUTION OF A WAR THAT WOULD NEVER HAVE BEGUN IF THE SHI'AR MAJESTOR VULCAN HADN'T ORDERED IT.
WAR DID THIS. WITH OUR VIOLENCE WE HAVE INJURED THE VERY MATTER OF THE STARS.
AND IT HAS COST US THE LIVES OF OUR KINGS. BLACK BOLT AND VULCAN ARE GONE.

THIS IS THE MOST RECENT INTELFEED MAPPING WE'VE OBTAINED?
YES, PRAETOR.
IT'S COMING FROM THE SEARCH SHIPS?
IT'S COLLATED FROM ALL THE VESSELS DIVERTED INTO THE FAULT ZONE TO SEE IF EITHER OUR MAJESTOR OR THE INHUMAN KING SURVIVED, PRAETOR.
THANK YOU. END IMMERSIVE HOLOPLAY.

CHANDILAR, THE SHIAR HOMEWORLD.
THE ROYAL AERIE.
WHAT'S NEXT?
THE CRIMINAL STARJAMMER *HAVOK* AWAITS YOU IN THE ANTEROOM, PRAETOR.
HE'S NO *CRIMINAL*, CONSUL ARAKI, AND I'M NO *PRAETOR*. *PLEASE* DON'T OBLIGE ME TO REMIND YOU AGAIN.
GLADIATOR WILL SUFFICE.

I APOLOGIZE ONCE MORE, PRAE-- GLADIATOR.
I CONFESS I AM SIMPLY EAGER TO PROVE MY *WORTH* TO THE ADMINISTRATION.
DON'T TRY SO *HARD*.
SIR, THE ARAKI SEQUENCE HAS DELIBERATELY CONSTITUTED ITS LATEST ITERATION AS A *FEMALE* IN ORDER TO DRAW A LINE UNDER THE *REGRETTABLE* ACTIONS OF MY PREDECESSOR.
MY SEQUENCE...MY *FAMILY*...WISHES TO *ATONE* FOR CHANCELLOR ARAKI'S SINS.

WHAT YOU MEAN IS THEY MADE YOU A *WOMAN* THIS TIME SO WE WOULDN'T HAVE TO LOOK AT A *YOUNG* VERSION OF THAT TREACHEROUS OLD MONSTER?
YES.
SERVE WELL AND *SPEAK PLAINLY*, ARAKI, AND YOUR FAMILY WILL *EARN* THE ABSOLUTION THEY CRAVE.

ADDITIONALLY, IT MAY HELP TO BEAR IN MIND WHAT I *DID* TO THE CHANCELLOR FOR HIS TREACHERY.
HE NO LONGER HAS A FACE TO SNEER AT ME WITH.
Y-YES, GLADIATOR.

SORRY TO KEEP YOU WAITING.
HELL, I WAS ENJOYING THE *NOVELTY*.
THE STARJAMMERS IN THE SHI'AR IMPERIAL PALACE AND NO *SIRENS* GOING OFF?
RACHEL HAS FINISHED THE *PSI-SCULPT*, KALLARK.

THIS IS *EVERY* DETAIL I COULD RECOVER THROUGH DEEP TELEPATHIC WORK.
WE DON'T KNOW HIS NAME, BUT *THIS* IS THE *ASSASSIN*. THIS IS THE MAN WHO *KILLED* LILANDRA.

I'LL HAVE THIS POSTED THROUGHOUT SHI'AR TERRITORY AS A *MEME ADVISORY*.
ANYONE WHO SEES THIS *ANIMAL* WILL INSTANTLY KNOW HIS CRIME.

KALLARK, WE WANTED TO TALK TO YOU--
I'M SORRY, HAVOK, BUT I'M TIRED AND THE STATE FUNERAL IS DEMANDING MY *FULL* ATTENTION.
IT'S ABOUT THE *SUCCESSION*. WE--
LATER. WE'LL TALK ABOUT IT *LATER*.

I *KNOW* WHAT THEY WANT TO SAY, AND I KNOW THEY *MEAN* WELL. OTHERS HAVE *ALREADY* MENTIONED THE SUCCESSION.
IT WILL TAKE A *STRONG* PERSON TO LEAD THE SHI'AR THROUGH THIS CALAMITOUS TIME, AND THAT PERSON *WON'T* BE ME.

THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM IS ON ITS *KNEES*.
I HAVE MANAGED TO CREATE A *SAFE ZONE* AROUND THE AERIE TO ALLOW THE *INTERIM ADMINISTRATION* TO OPERATE, BUT CHANDILAR AS A WHOLE IS *BURNING*.
CIVIL WAR RAGES ACROSS THE HOMEWORLD AND *ALL* THE WORLDS OF THE IMPERIUM.
PRESUMING THERE'S *STILL* AN IMPERIUM AT ALL.

WE LOST THE WAR. WE SURRENDERED *UNCONDITIONALLY* TO THE KREE.

THEIR INHUMAN MONARCHY MAY SIMPLY CHOOSE TO *DISMANTLE* THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM.

TO TAKE IT APART LIKE AN OLD STARSHIP IN A *BREAKER'S YARD*. TO *PARTITION* IT FOR EASE OF GOVERNANCE...

NEVERTHELESS, SURRENDER WAS THE *RIGHT* CHOICE. THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM HAD LOST ITS SOUL IN THE BLOODSHED OF VULCAN'S REIGN. *DRASTIC* THOUGH SURRENDER MAY BE, WE NEEDED JUST SUCH AN INTERVENTION TO BRING US TO OUR SENSES. TO HELP US *SURVIVE*.

UHM, GLADIATOR?

YES, CONSUL ARAKI?

SIGNAL FROM THE ORBITAL FORTS, SIR. THE INHUMAN MISSION HAS BEEN SIGHTED. THEY WILL BE HERE BY DAWN.

THANK YOU, ARAKI.

IT IS NECESSARY THAT THE ISSUE OF *SUCCESSION* BE DISCUSSED.

NOT NOW.

YES, NOW.

THE ISSUE IS MURKY AT *BEST*. THE FILIAL GENITURE OF THE KEY NOBLE SEQUENCES HAVE BECOME SO *ENTANGLED* IN THE LAST FEW DECADES--

--ANY DECLARATION OF *BLOOD* INHERITANCE WOULD SIMPLY *AGGRAVATE* THE CIVIL WAR.

NEXT, PUTTING ASIDE THE FACT THAT THE BULK OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD, SWORN DEFENDERS OF THE IMPERIUM, QUESTION THE *LEGALITY* OF KA'ARDUM'S SURRENDER...

...THE GUARD AND MANY NOBLE FACTIONS HAVE INSISTED THAT UNTIL SUCH TIME AS *PHYSICAL* PROOF OF VULCAN'S DEATH CAN BE PRODUCED, THE ISSUE OF SUCCESSION IS MOOT *ANYWAY*.

IF THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM IS GOING TO *SURVIVE*, PRAETOR, THEN IT NEEDS A *FIGUREHEAD*. SOMEONE POPULAR AND STRONG. SOMEONE *CHARISMATIC*.

DO YOU SEE WHERE I'M GOING WITH THIS, PRAETOR?

I *TOLD* YOU, ARAKI.

I'M *NOT* YOUR PRAETOR.

AND I'M *CERTAINLY* NOT YOUR MAJESTOR.

EVERYBODY SEEMS TO THINK I'M THE *NATURAL* CHOICE. THEY ARE *MISTAKEN*.

MY WHOLE LIFE, I HAVE SERVED AT THE PLEASURE OF THE THRONE. I MAY HAVE LED THE IMPERIAL GUARD, BUT I'M STILL A SOLDIER, AN *INSTRUMENT*. I'VE NO MORE RIGHT OF QUALIFICATION TO SIT ON THE THRONE THAN A COMMON *GRUNT TROOPER*.

IN THE END, I IMAGINE OUR NEW OVERLORDS *THE INHUMANS* WILL DECIDE WHO RULES.

THEY WILL APPOINT SOMEONE...A REGENT, A PROXY, A *VICEROY* TO OVERSEE THE SHI'AR TERRITORIES ON THEIR BEHALF.

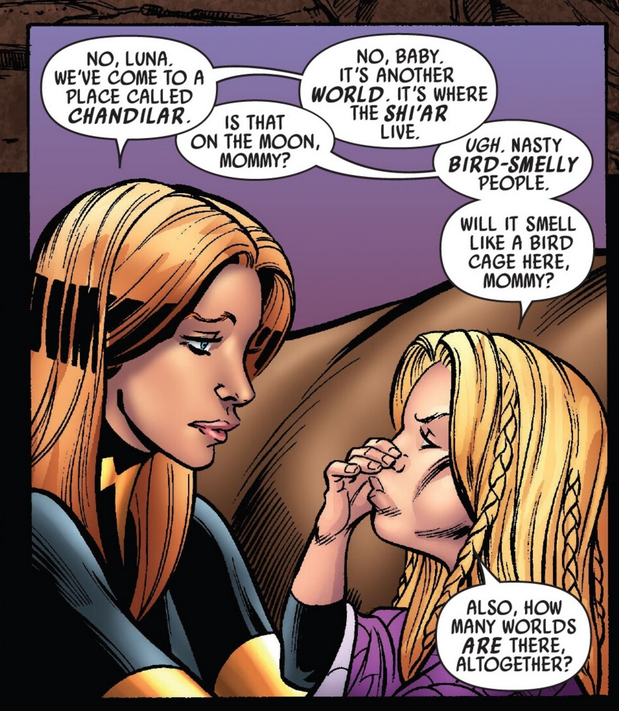
WE'LL KNOW SOON ENOUGH. THEY ARRIVE AT DAWN.

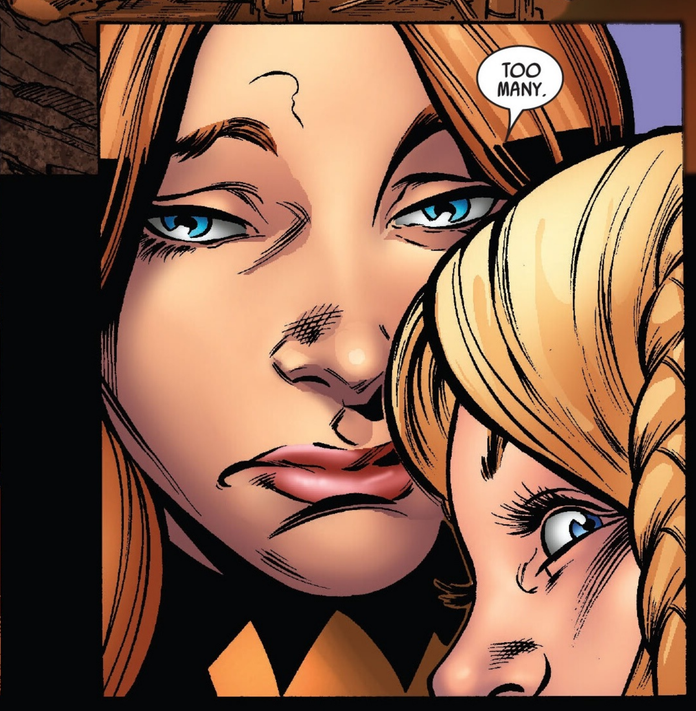
WE ARRIVE AT DAWN. WE DESCEND THROUGH DENSE GLOBAL CLOUD COVER IN WHICH I CAN TASTE THE AWFUL SMOKE OF *WAR*.

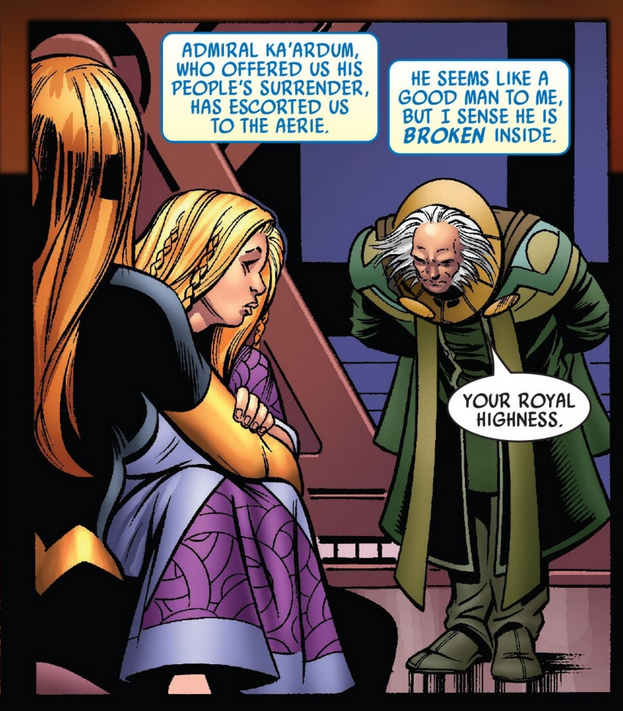
I IMAGINE OUR CITY MAKES QUITE AN IMPRESSION AS IT COMES DOWN.

I ALSO IMAGINE THERE ISN'T A SHI'AR CITIZEN ON THE GROUND WHO WOULD NOT LOVE TO SEE ATTILAN *VAPORIZED*.

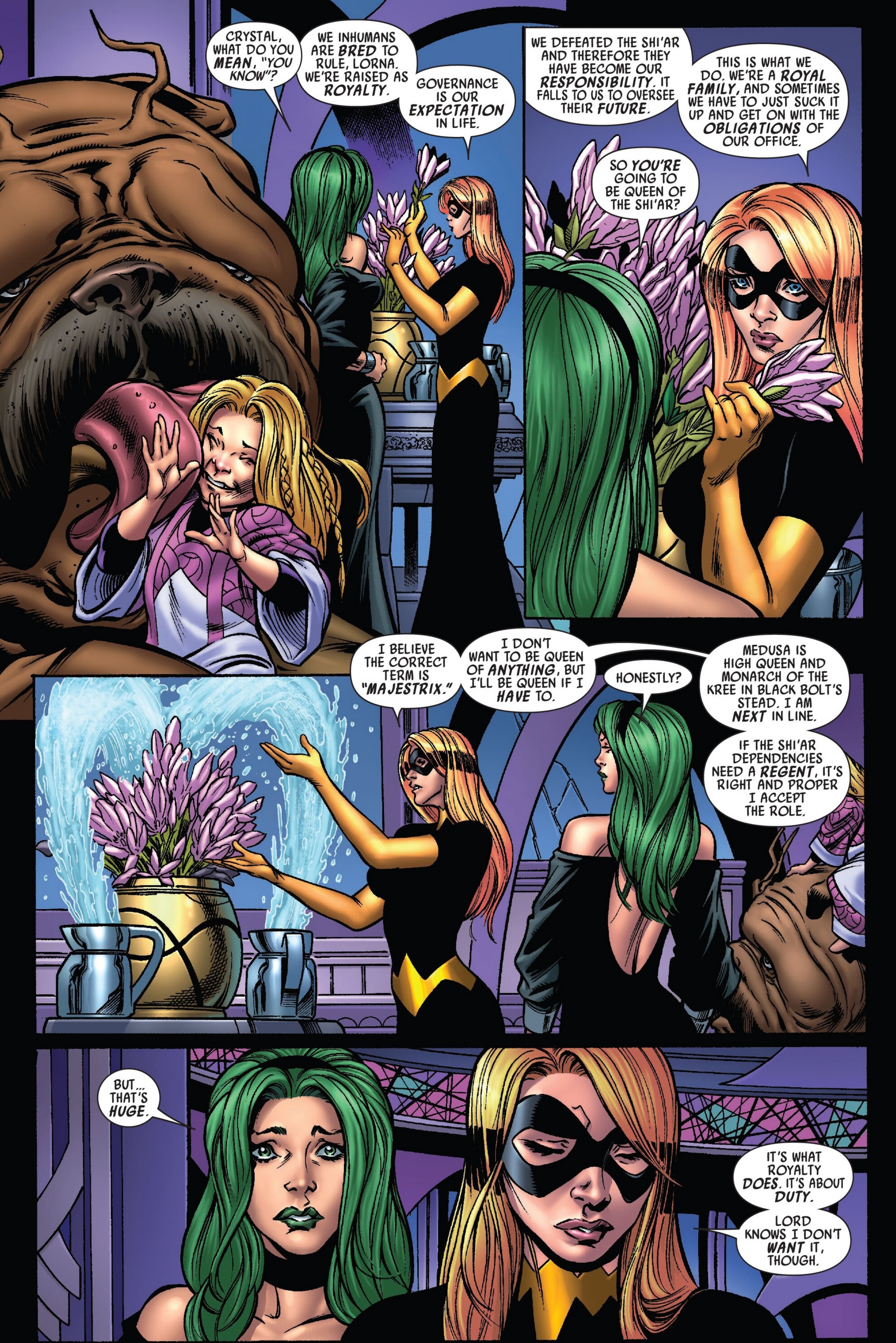
WE ARE COMING HERE AS CONQUERORS. AS *INVADERS*.

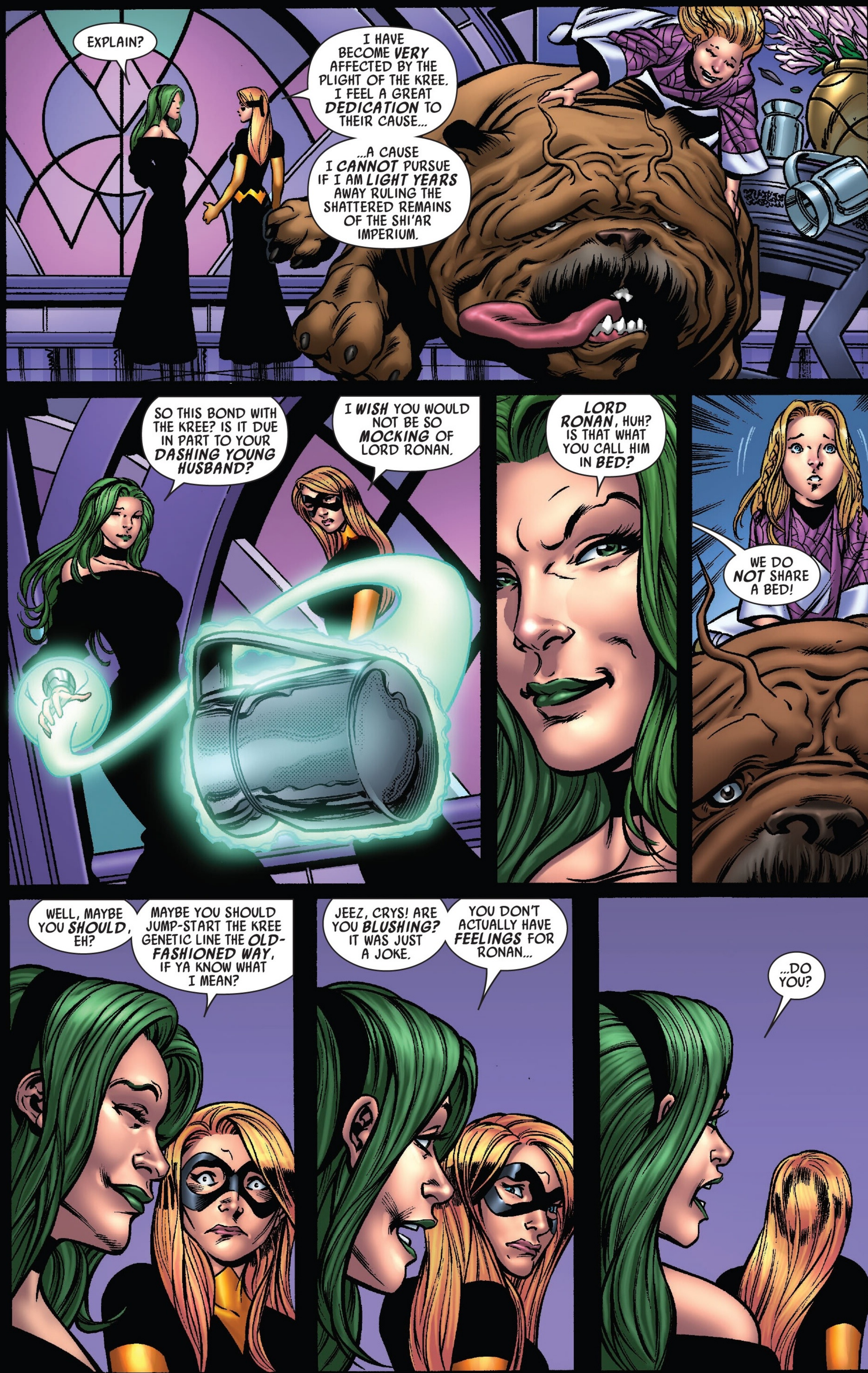






WITH BLACK BOLT GONE, MEDUSA IS QUEEN.
MY SISTER IS IN MOURNING. SHE HASN'T SPOKEN, AND THAT IRONY IS NOT LOST ON ANY OF US.
EVERYONE HOPES SHE WILL FIND A WAY TO SECURE GENUINE PEACE BETWEEN THE SHI'AR AND KREE WORLDS.
GORGON, CAN I BE KING?
NO, MAXIMUS.
OH, LET ME! I'D BE GREAT!
NO.
BUT I WANT TO BE KING OF SOMETHING!
YOUR PEOPLE NEED A FIRM HAND ON THE TILLER NOW, KA'ARDUM.
THIS I KNOW, ACCUSER.
YOU HAVE NERAMANI BLOOD IN YOU. HAVE YOU THOUGHT--?
ME? OH, NO. NOT NOW. NOT ANYMORE.
HALF THE IMPERIUM WOULD INSTANTLY RISE UP AGAINST ME. MY BLOODLINE HAS STAINED THE SHI'AR TOO DEEPLY.
I KNOW HOW THAT SONG GOES, ADMIRAL. I RULED THE KREE, OUT OF NECESSITY.
I WOULD NOT TAKE THE BURDEN BACK.
I ALREADY KNOW IT'S GOING TO BE ME.


CRYSTAL, WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "YOU KNOW"?
WE INHUMANS ARE BRED TO RULE, LORNA. WE'RE RAISED AS ROYALTY.
GOVERNANCE IS OUR EXPECTATION IN LIFE.
WE DEFEATED THE SHI'AR AND THEREFORE THEY HAVE BECOME OUR RESPONSIBILITY. IT FALLS TO US TO OVERSEE THEIR FUTURE.
THIS IS WHAT WE DO. WE'RE A ROYAL FAMILY, AND SOMETIMES WE HAVE TO JUST SUCK IT UP AND GET ON WITH THE OBLIGATIONS OF OUR OFFICE.
SO YOU'RE GOING TO BE QUEEN OF THE SHI'AR?
I BELIEVE THE CORRECT TERM IS "MAJESTRIX."
I DON'T WANT TO BE QUEEN OF ANYTHING, BUT I'LL BE QUEEN IF I HAVE TO.
HONESTLY?
MEDUSA IS HIGH QUEEN AND MONARCH OF THE KREE IN BLACK BOLT'S STEAD. I AM NEXT IN LINE.
IF THE SHI'AR DEPENDENCIES NEED A REGENT, IT'S RIGHT AND PROPER I ACCEPT THE ROLE.
BUT... THAT'S HUGE.
IT'S WHAT ROYALTY DOES. IT'S ABOUT DUTY.
LORD KNOWS I DON'T WANT IT, THOUGH.


EXPLAIN?
I HAVE BECOME VERY AFFECTED BY THE PLIGHT OF THE KREE. I FEEL A GREAT DEDICATION TO THEIR CAUSE...
...A CAUSE I CANNOT PURSUE IF I AM LIGHT YEARS AWAY RULING THE SHATTERED REMAINS OF THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM.
SO THIS BOND WITH THE KREE? IS IT DUE IN PART TO YOUR DASHING YOUNG HUSBAND?
I WISH YOU WOULD NOT BE SO MOCKING OF LORD RONAN.
LORD RONAN, HUH? IS THAT WHAT YOU CALL HIM IN BED?
WE DO NOT SHARE A BED!
WELL, MAYBE YOU SHOULD, EH?
MAYBE YOU SHOULD JUMP-START THE KREE GENETIC LINE THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY, IF YA KNOW WHAT I MEAN?
JEEZ, CRYS! ARE YOU BLUSHING? IT WAS JUST A JOKE.
YOU DON'T ACTUALLY HAVE FEELINGS FOR RONAN...
...DO YOU?

I GET HER OFF THE TOPIC BY TURNING THE CONVERSATION *BACK* TO THE QUESTION OF THE SHI'AR SUCCESSION.

THAT'S WHEN SHE TELLS ME ABOUT *KALLARK*.

THE SUBURB OF ZA'TAI, FIFTY KILOMETERS NORTH OF THE AERIE.

I SPEND THE DAY IN ZA'TAI, ESCORTING RELIEF COLUMNS.

I'M ANXIOUS TO EXTEND THE SAFE ZONE TO INCLUDE THIS AREA, AND THE LOCAL ELDERS TELL ME WHAT THEY NEED IN TERMS OF FOOD AND MEDICAL SUPPORT.

THEN SOMEONE STARTS YELLING.

THERE'S SOMEONE ALIVE UNDER THE K'KYEN PLANT! WE *HEARD* THEM!

QUICKLY!

ORBITAL BOMBING LEVELLED THE K'KYEN POWER PLANT SIX DAYS AGO.

AND SOMEONE'S *STILL* ALIVE BENEATH THE RUBBLE.

HERE, PRAETOR! *HERE!*

GET BACK! *BACK!*

CAN YOU REACH THEM?

YES, PRAETOR!

HURRY! THIS ISN'T STABLE!

HURRY! NHH! HURRY!
LET ME HELP.
I CAN BRACE IT.
SHRAHKK
I AM CRYSTAL.
I KNOW WHO YOU ARE.
YOU'VE DONE AMAZING WORK HOLDING THINGS TOGETHER.

I'VE SERVED THE THRONE ALL MY LIFE. I'M NOT GOING TO STOP NOW.
YOU COULD DO MORE.
I'M NOT GOING TO GET DRAWN INTO THIS CONVERSATION.
YOU KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT, THEN?
I SERVE THE THRONE IN AN APPROPRIATE FASHION. I WILL NOT OVERSTEP MY LIMITS.
BUT YOU'RE CAPABLE OF IT.
YOU RENOUNCED THE SITTING MAJESTOR IN ORDER TO SUPPORT LILANDRA BECAUSE YOU BELIEVED IT WAS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE SHI'AR.
YES, AND THUS I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR HER DEATH AND THIS CIVIL WAR!
THE GUILT WILL LIVE WITH ME, I CAN ASSURE YOU!
SPARE ME YOUR SELF-PITY.
YOU'RE PREPARED TO BREAK ANY RULE IF THE CAUSE IS MORALLY RIGHT.
WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT IT?
NOTHING. I KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THE SHI'AR.
NOTHING ABOUT THEIR SPIRIT OR THEIR NEEDS. NOTHING ABOUT THEIR CULTURE OR THEIR POLITICS.
ABSOLUTELY NOTHING.
SO GOD HELP THEM WHEN THEY PUT ME IN CHARGE.

THE NEXT DAY.

LILANDRA'S FUNERAL PROCEEDS IN SILENCE. I CAN FEEL THE EXTRAORDINARY WEIGHT OF GRIEF, THE AGONY OF AN ENTIRE *PEOPLE*, HANGING IN THE AIR.

ALL I CAN THINK IS--

THE IMPERIAL GUARD WILL NOT ALLOW THIS TRAVESTY TO PROCEED ANY FURTHER.
WE DO NOT RECOGNIZE THE AUTHORITY OF THE INTERIM ADMINISTRATION.
WE DO NOT RECOGNIZE THE LEGALITY OF THE TERMS OF SURRENDER.
THERE IS NO PROOF OF MAJESTOR VULCAN'S DEATH.
UNTIL SUCH TIME AS A LEGITIMATE, MANDATED RULE CAN BE ESTABLISHED, THE IMPERIAL GUARD WILL ASSUME CONTROL.
AND THE INHUMANS WILL GO HOME.
I TOLD YOU THIS WAS A BAD IDEA.
SO THE IMPERIAL GUARD PLAYS ITS HAND AT LAST...
THIS IS LITTLE SHORT OF A MILITARY COUP!
LET ME SNAP SOME SPINES. I SWEAR I'LL BE DISCREET.
THIS WOULD NEVER HAVE HAPPENED UNDER MY REGIME.

YOU UNWORTHY--!
AGGHH!
GRAAAAAAHHH!
UGH!
LOOK OUT! THE QUEEN HAS GONE MAD!

PROTECT THE QUEEN!
SHI'AR! EAT THE FOCUSED SOUND OF BLACK BOLT'S VOICE!
GROOUGH!
NGHH!
MAJESTY! WE'RE WITH YOU!
MY HUSBAND LAID DOWN HIS LIFE TO DEFEAT YOU, AND STILL YOU DEFY US?!
AGHH!

WE ARE THE INHUMANS! YOU WILL KNEEL!
UHKK!
GET IT OFF! GET IT OFF ME!
BEAT THEM! BEAT THE UPSTART SHI'AR DEVILS UNTIL THEY LEARN SOME MANNERS!
I DO NOT BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING...

THIS IS A FUNERAL, FOR RANDAC'S SAKE...
ENOUGH!
SHOW SOME RESPECT!
GODS ABOVE, I WILL NOT SEE THIS IMPERIUM FALL ANY FURTHER OR SPLIT ANY DEEPER.
I WAS PRAETOR ONCE. I WILL NOT WATCH YOU DO THIS.

THIS BELONGS TO YOU.
NO.
SOMETIMES, TO SERVE THE THRONE, YOU'VE GOT TO BE THE THRONE.

DAMN YOU.

SO, KALLARK THE FIRST.
IT WILL DO FOR NOW, I SUPPOSE.

A PLACEHOLDER IN THE GREAT PURPOSE.

FZZAMM

THE GREAT PURPOSE OF TALON AND THE FRATERNITY OF RAPTORS.

ELSEWHERE.
SO THE SHI'AR HAVE A NEW RULER, A STRONG FIGUREHEAD TO LEAD THEM INTO THIS DANGEROUS NEW AGE.
IF THEY COULD ONLY SEE WHAT I CAN SEE. IF THEY COULD ONLY SEE HALF OF THE HORROR THAT THE FAULT WILL BRING TO THEIR UNIVERSE.
I PITY THE SHI'AR! THEY HAVE SPENT SO LONG AGONIZING ABOUT WHO WILL RULE...
...WHEN WE ALL KNOW THE MAGUS WILL RULE IN THE END!
THE BEGINNING!

Guardians of the Galaxy #16 unused cover by SALVADOR LARROCA & FRANK D'ARMATA

MARVEL SPOTLIGHT™

WAR of KINGS™

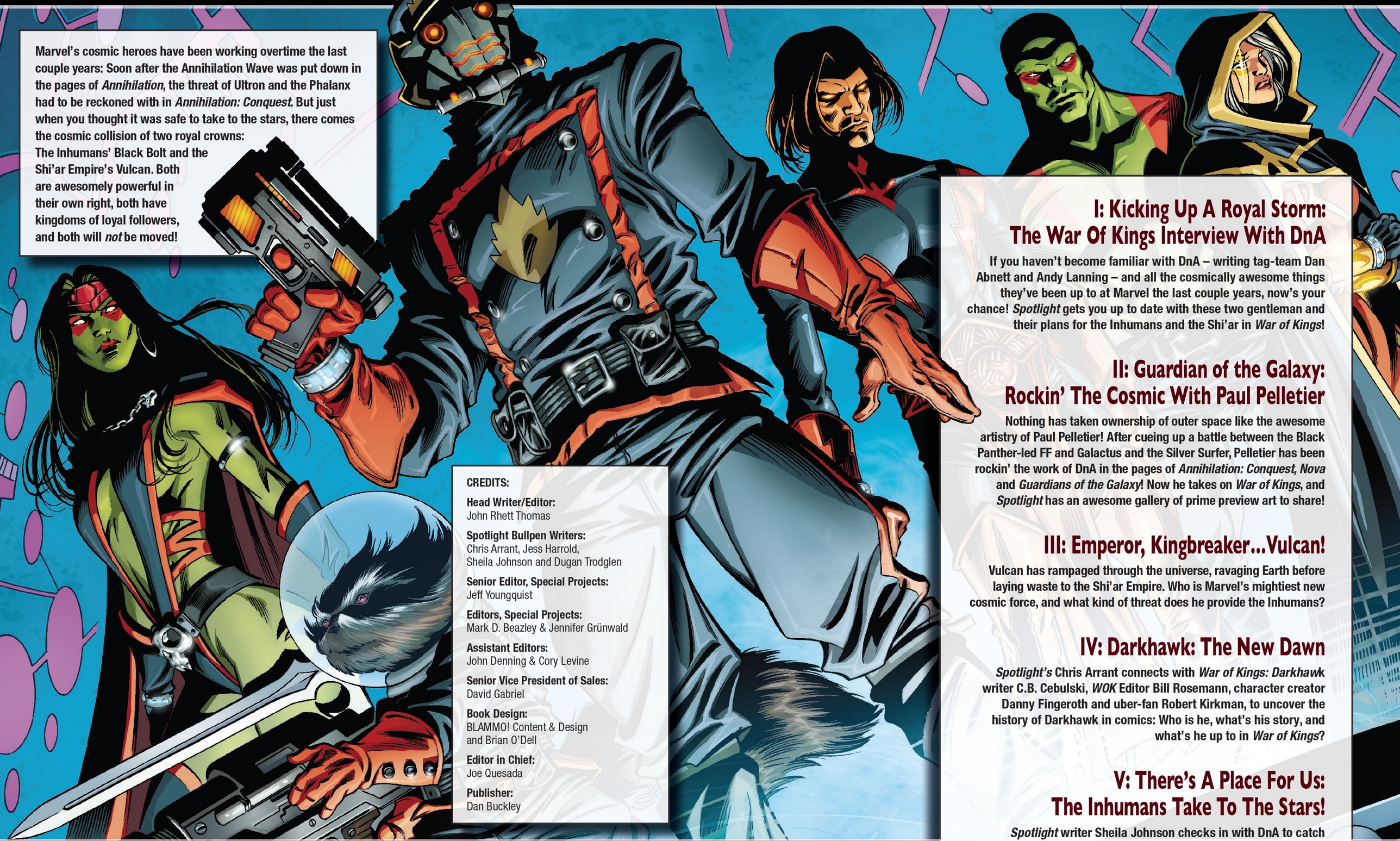
BLACK BOLT VS. VULCAN IN A BATTLE FOR THE STARS!

Inside *War of Kings* With Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning!

SECRET INVASION

was only the beginning . . .

PLUGGING IN THE SPOTLIGHT



Marvel's cosmic heroes have been working overtime the last couple years: Soon after the Annihilation Wave was put down in the pages of *Annihilation*, the threat of Ultron and the Phalanx had to be reckoned with in *Annihilation: Conquest*. But just when you thought it was safe to take to the stars, there comes the cosmic collision of two royal crowns: The Inhumans' Black Bolt and the Shi'ar Empire's Vulcan. Both are awesomely powerful in their own right, both have kingdoms of loyal followers, and both will *not* be moved!

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Dan Buckley

I: Kicking Up A Royal Storm: The War Of Kings Interview With DnA

If you haven't become familiar with DnA – writing tag-team Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning – and all the cosmically awesome things they've been up to at Marvel the last couple years, now's your chance! *Spotlight* gets you up to date with these two gentleman and their plans for the Inhumans and the Shi'ar in *War of Kings*!

II: Guardian of the Galaxy: Rockin' The Cosmic With Paul Pelletier

Nothing has taken ownership of outer space like the awesome artistry of Paul Pelletier! After cueing up a battle between the Black Panther-led FF and Galactus and the Silver Surfer, Pelletier has been rockin' the work of DnA in the pages of *Annihilation: Conquest, Nova* and *Guardians of the Galaxy*! Now he takes on *War of Kings*, and *Spotlight* has an awesome gallery of prime preview art to share!

III: Emperor, Kingbreaker...Vulcan!

Vulcan has rampaged through the universe, ravaging Earth before laying waste to the Shi'ar Empire. Who is Marvel's mightiest new cosmic force, and what kind of threat does he provide the Inhumans?

IV: Darkhawk: The New Dawn

Spotlight's Chris Arrant connects with *War of Kings: Darkhawk* writer C.B. Cebulski, *WOK* Editor Bill Rosemann, character creator Danny Fingeroth and uber-fan Robert Kirkman, to uncover the history of Darkhawk in comics: Who is he, what's his story, and what's he up to in *War of Kings*?

V: There's A Place For Us: The Inhumans Take To The Stars!

Spotlight writer Sheila Johnson checks in with DnA to catch *Spotlight* readers up on the Inhumans past, present and future!

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KICKING UP A ROYAL STORM

THE WAR OF KINGS INTERVIEW WITH DAN ABNETT AND ANDY LANNING

Ending A War And Launching A New One. Reviving Old Characters And Starting New Titles. It's All In A Light Year's Work For DnA

By Jess Harrold

Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning, the stellar writing team their fans refer to as "DnA," have their genetic fingerprints all over Marvel's current cosmic resurgence. After revitalizing the man called Nova during the *Annihilation* event and thereafter launching him into a critically acclaimed monthly series, the pair took the reins for the epic sequel, *Annihilation: Conquest*. Cementing their place as Marvel's very own "Guardians of the Galaxy," the British duo launched the disparate heroes of *Conquest* into a second ongoing series bearing that famous name. From talking raccoons to walking trees, sci-fi novelist Dan and comic book inker Andy have assembled a colorful cast of characters and carved out a cosmic corner of the Marvel Universe that is all their own.

Now, in their 21st year of working together, Dan and Andy come of age with a star-crossed tale that pits classic Silver Age creations Black Bolt and the Inhumans against the Shi'ar Empire and its despotic leader, Gabriel "Vulcan" Summers. They've annihilated. They've conquered. Now DnA are braced for the battle royal that is *War of Kings*.

SPOTLIGHT: So, if you'll excuse the dated musical reference, *War of Kings*: What is it good for?

ANDY: Absolutely nothing!

DAN: You fell into their trap… It's an enormously fun star-shaking event, a proper extension of existing stories in the Marvel Universe, following on from *Secret Invasion* and *Annihilation* and linking together major strands that have previously been disconnected: The heroes, the cosmics, and the X-Men books. It has a Machiavellian quality, as a story about power-playing and authority, war and politics, between great houses and royal families.

SPOTLIGHT: If it was a film, how would movie trailer guy sum it up?

ANDY: "In a universe…" Actually, rather a film trailer snippet, we thought our movie pitch for this would be *Star Wars* meets *I, Claudius* (a classic British drama serial depicting a Roman emperor with a stutter). Our central character even has a speech impediment…

SPOTLIGHT: In contrast to the universal threats that drove the stories in *Annihilation* and *Conquest*, *War of Kings* sees the Shi'ar and the Inhumans – and in particular their respective leaders, the titular kings Vulcan and Black Bolt – on a collision course. Where do readers find them at the start of *War of Kings*?

ANDY: The Inhumans we pick up directly from the end of the *Secret Invasion: Inhumans* limited series, with the *Secret Invasion: War of Kings* one-shot. That gives us an opportunity to put all the players and pieces in position, particularly coming out of the *Secret Invasion* element of the story, where Black Bolt obviously has been royally messed around with by the Skrulls, and wants to get some payback.

DAN: The Inhumans are basically saying for the first time, "We're not going

"The Inhumans are basically saying for the first time, 'We're not going to take it any more.'" – ***War of Kings*** **co-writer Dan Abnett**

to take it any more." They've perennially been the stoic victims of the Marvel Universe. Now, finally, they're rolling their sleeves up and are actively going to pursue their own destinies. If that means breaking a few eggs in the process, that's what's going to happen. This time they are doing something that will have lasting repercussions. Proper things happen. From a Shi'ar point of view it's been shown in recent X-Men stories, particularly the recent *X-Men: Kingbreaker* series, that Emperor Vulcan is pursuing an incredibly aggressive and expansionist regime. He wants to make the Shi'ar Empire bigger and stronger than ever before. The Kree are always going to be an obstacle to that, but he feels that, with the Kree very weak after Annihilation and the Phalanx invasion, he can take them with a minimum of fuss. What happens with the Inhumans and the political ramifications of their actions gives him every excuse, if excuse he needed, to go marching in there and say you're far too dangerous as neighbors and I'm going to do something about it.

ANDY: Everybody is being very ambitious.

SPOTLIGHT: Vulcan is a fairly new character. How would you describe him to a reader unfamiliar with his X-Men appearances?

DAN: He's the missing Summers brother to Havok and Cyclops but he's not entirely sane. He's got a huge chip on his shoulder about the crimes committed against him and his family in the past, so he's risen by brute force and mutant ability to be the emperor of the Shi'ar. We think of him very much as the Roman emperor Caligula. Short of making his own horse a senator…

ANDY: (*Interjects.*) Give him time.

DAN: …the parallels are quite strong.

ANDY: And he killed his own father. But we don't want him to be a pantomime villain, standing their twiddling his moustache (which he's obviously going to grow...) He's also doing this from a point of view of "he wants to be loved." He loves being adored by the Shi'ar, and he thinks the best way to get their adoration is to just keep conquering other people. It's kind of twisted, kind of sick. I believe the phrase is "mad as a box of frogs."

SPOTLIGHT: In contrast with Vulcan, the Inhumans date back to the classic Lee/Kirby *Fantastic Four*

SOUNDS OF WAR: Black Bolt unleashes the full force of his sonic scream at oncoming Shi'ar battle cruisers. (Art from *Secret Invasion: War of Kings* one-shot by Paul Pelletier.)

THE RESOLVE OF A QUEEN: Medusa stands resolutely by Black Bolt's momentous decision. (Art from *SI:WOK* one-shot by Pelletier.)

run. What do you think is their enduring appeal? What plans do you have to put your own stamp on them?

DAN: I think they are just great Stan and Jack characters, very distinctive, very memorable, but distinctly quirky. They have what is rare, I think, apart from the Fantastic Four – that family feeling. The fact that they're royalty is very interesting and they are all about nobility and responsibility as much as family ties.

ANDY: The Inhumans in their history were created by the Kree to become their Praetorian fighting force and during the course of the series we will see them living up to that heritage, which, up until now, they've denied and shied away from. They're going to become a lot more proactive, to the extent that they are going to weaponize some of their powers.

DAN: They'll be using weaponry that Maximus has designed for them, so they will get that slightly cool militaristic feel.

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of Maximus, Black Bolt is working together with his mad brother at the end of *Secret Invasion*. What's your take on him?

ANDY: The reason we know he's mad is his name is Maximus the Mad. He was done for from birth that lad.

DAN: A little bit. Although Maximus has been genuinely mad on occasions, we see him as more troubled and misunderstood. He's not a black and white evil character, there's a lot that can be done with him.

ANDY: I think Maximus' madness is tidal, it depends on the moon.

DAN: Unfortunately, he lives on it!

SPOTLIGHT: Following *Secret Invasion*, Crystal is betrothed to Ronan the Accuser, a Kree. Is he a third king in the war? Will wedding bells ring out while war rages on?

ANDY: Ronan's sort of got a role as a pre-regent of the Kree, as it were, and that promise will not be forgotten about. There will be all sorts of royal shenanigans there.

SPOTLIGHT: Rival houses, reluctant marriage, and a key character in Vulcan that killed his own father. It's all sounding very Shakespearean…

DAN: Absolutely, there are parallels to be drawn. Roman dynasties, all that sort of thing. We're also both big fans of *Dune*, which has large dynastic entities fighting against each other and plotting down the centuries.

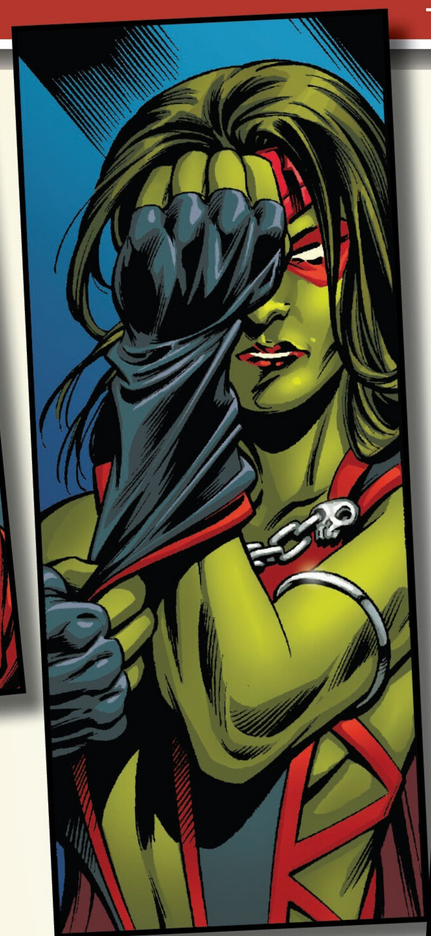
SPOTLIGHT: Are there any supporting characters to look out for that you've enjoyed writing?

DAN: We've deliberately chosen central point of view characters who are not the big bosses. We chose Crystal to represent the Inhumans, and Gladiator for the Imperial Guard, both as right hand

AT THE FEET OF A KING: Ronan kneels to Black Bolt on behalf of the entire Kree race. (Art from *SI:WOK* one-shot by Pelletier.)

"…We're trying to take readers into the cosmic wackiness via characters written on a very human level…"

– *War of Kings* co-writer Andy Lanning



people serving the leaders. Guardian is someone who has been around forever, but we are trying to put some flesh on those bones, so you actually go somewhere with the character. We've also enjoyed the Starjammers. One character we didn't think would be so important is Polaris, but then we realized her brother, Quicksilver, used to be married to Crystal. It's another example of how the Inhumans have ties all over the Marvel Universe.

SPOTLIGHT: Are there any stars-in-waiting you could see breaking out into their own titles after *War of Kings*, the way Nova did from *Annihilation*, and the *Guardians of the Galaxy* characters evolved from both *Annihilation* series?

ANDY: We think that if there is going to be a break-out character it's likely to be Darkhawk, because, rather like we did with Nova, he's the character we're dusting off in this series and particularly his own parallel mini-series, *War of Kings: Ascension*. If we do our job properly, people will want to see more of him, because we think we've got a very intriguing and compelling story to tell that will reposition Darkhawk as a main player. But who knows, it could be Lockjaw.

DAN: We've got two major dog characters with Cosmo, the Guardians' security chief. Rocket Raccoon as well. We could have an all animal team.

ANDY: Beware when they start marking their territory.

SPOTLIGHT: Do you have room on your collective plate for a third monthly Marvel series?

ANDY: At the moment, we write a book a week. One of those is the *Ascension* limited series. We're creaking under the strain, but it's all very enjoyable.

DAN: The great thing about it is that we might be writing a book a week but they're all books that tie into each other. Working at such a rate means we can keep track of all the continuity; we're feeding storylines from one book to another. If we were doing completely different Marvel books that would probably be more difficult. We'd be thrilled to expand the Marvel cosmos and give these characters room to stand on their own feet.

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of your monthly series, to what extent will *Nova* and *Guardians of the Galaxy* intersect with *War of Kings*?

ANDY: Drawing an analogy with World War II, the war happening will lead to other events elsewhere. Both *Nova* and *Guardians* definitely will be intersecting with *War of Kings*, but only so much in that we will be telling their own stories against the backdrop of this massive galactic conflict. We've tried very much, as we did during *Secret Invasion*, to make sure we're telling the stories we want to tell rather than putting our stories on hold whilst we feel obliged to go into a crossover. The fact that we are orchestrating the main book makes that a lot easier because we can pick and choose the moments at which they cross over and have those make actual sense in the framework of both stories.

SPOTLIGHT: What do you think it is about Richard Rider that is clicking now with the comic-buying audience in a way that earlier attempts to bring him back have been less successful?

DAN: Nova's a long established character even if he's never had huge success. One of the things we did with him at first was to write his character as if he was actually aware of his own status, that he knew he was a second or third rate character who'd never really made it. That understanding allowed us to build on him and turn him into, certainly in terms of powers, a premier division super hero. Once you start playing with him like that and taking him seriously, it suddenly gives his character more impact. He makes a very cool cosmic hero, whereas on Earth he was more limited.

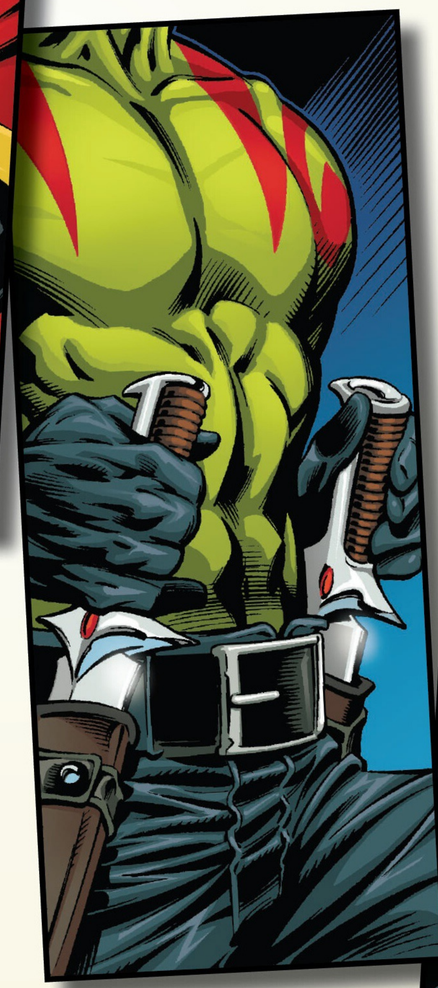
ANDY: We both grew up with Nova, and loved his stories when we were kids. There's a lot of story potential with him because nobody has done a lot with him. Hopefully, people reading it with a sense of nostalgia feel like they're getting to see that character grow up and realize that potential along with us. We find that exciting and hopefully, so far, it seems that other people do too.

SPOTLIGHT: The Nova Corps has re-formed just in time for *War of Kings*, and one of the Centurions is Shi'ar. Will they have their hands full during *War of Kings*?

ANDY: You've spotted what we've done there.

DAN: The Nova Corps, like the Guardians (though for slightly different reasons), will want hostilities to end; they'll want to bring it under control, a bit like the UN being sent into a trouble spot. Having one of them being Shi'ar, well, attach story point here…

SPOTLIGHT: Nova has obviously made an impression on his former New Warriors teammate, Darkhawk. Is that something you'll develop in *War of Kings: Ascension*?



GUARDIANS OF THE 21st CENTURY: Abnett and Lanning's new fighting force of Guardians include (from left to right) Star-Lord, Gamora, Quasar, Drax the Destroyer, Rocket Raccoon and Adam Warlock. (Art by Paul Pelletier.)

DAN: That's exactly how we're playing Darkhawk. He's looking at how Richard's gone out as a third rate space hero and come back as a warrior veteran of a cosmic war. He can see potential for himself there, and is a bit envious of Rich because they kind of grew up together.

SPOTLIGHT: As for *Guardians of the Galaxy*, you have a cast of characters that haven't seen much development in years, or even decades. How have you gone about scripting an anthropomorphic raccoon, giving motivation to an ambulant tree, or working out what makes Bug >tik<?

ANDY: Ba-dum tish! Really and truly, Keith Giffen set the bar so high with those characters in the *Star-Lord* limited series during *Annihilation*, and made them so likeable and such fun, it would be a crime not to do more with them. Instantly you could see the potential there, and we felt compelled to take that and run with it and threw in as much craziness as we could – their base is a decapitated Celestial head, they have a telepathic Russian cosmonaut dog as a security chief. All those ingredients we've mixed in have, we hope, kept that wacky flavor Keith created, and it seems to have struck a chord with people.

DAN: All these characters are fundamentally quite interesting, they're quirky, they've got bags of potential for humor. And because they are not the most famous heroes in the Marvel Universe, and they've only ever existed in little limited series or guest appearances, there's an enormous area to expand them because they haven't been developed. It's not like being given a team of well-known Avengers, where you have such a weight of continuity on you because you have Iron Man and Thor. The opportunities for expanding those characters are much more limited because the boundaries are set. With Rocket, Groot and Star-Lord there is much further you can go with them and greater creative freedom.

SPOTLIGHT: The title has already seen one "changing of the guard." Will the old order changeth once more during *War of Kings*?

DAN: Yes. The Guardians are going to be up to quite a lot during *War of Kings*, so we're actually sort of expanding their lineup again, bringing in some people that should be there and a couple of complete surprises. For the duration of *War of Kings* they will be quite a large team, though seldom deployed all in one place.

ANDY: They've got a whole galaxy to guard after all.

SPOTLIGHT: Guardians, Nova and the Annihilation events have been very successful. But why do you think cosmic books have been such a hard sell before now?

ANDY: Cosmic books take place in an abstract universe where anything can happen, and anything can be undone, and when you do that, as they have had a tendency to do in the past, you lose your resonance with your readers. What we're trying to do, which I think our readers appreciate, is that we're trying to take them into the cosmic wackiness via characters written on a very human

level that are a touchstone for the readers themselves.

DAN: Also, we're trying to establish as best we can the cosmic playground, so there is a sense of a consistent geography of where the Shi'ar and the Kree and certain planets are. It may not be as familiar as the real world that people actually know, but it's not just endless space and another invented planet.

SPOTLIGHT: Looking to the future, once the dust settles on *War of Kings*, are you still brimming with energy with years' worth of celestial extravaganzas left to tell? Or are you all spaced out and yearning for some street level Marvel action?

DAN: We've got loads of stuff we want to do yet. We love doing this; Marvel cosmic is just brilliant to work with. We grew up with it and loved it ever since we started reading it. We have got a lot of ideas for different stories, and for every character there's something we particularly want to do with them. We've still got a lot of stuff from the initial pitch we had for Nova that we haven't gotten to, plus we've got all the red herrings and portents we've thrown in along the way. We've got them queuing up like, well, something that queues a lot.

SPOTLIGHT: Are there any characters from Marvel's rich cosmic history you still haven't been able to use after *War of Kings*, but hope to in the future?

NOVA CORPS: In the pages of *Nova*, Abnett and Lanning have revived the Nova Corps on Earth…led by Richard Rider's brother, Robert! Nova's *War of Kings* tie-in begins with *Nova #23*. (Art from *Nova #20* by Wellinton Alves.)

DnA TEST

Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning have been writing together for 21 years, but who has been paying the most attention during that time? Spotlight sat them in soundproof booths, and quizzed them to see which partner knows most about the other.

Dan on Andy

Dan Abnett

Who is Andy's favorite Guardian of the Galaxy?
Rocket. Or Groot.

If Andy could write any other Marvel book, what would it be?
Doctor Strange or *Thor*, maybe?

What was Andy's first Marvel comic book?
To read, I would think early *FF* or Thomas/Buscema *Avengers*.

Which is it for Andy: Star Trek or Star Wars?
Ooooh, loves both, but in a pinch, I'd have to say it would be Kirk-era *Trek*.

What is Andy's favorite cheese?
A really mature cheddar. Which is odd, because 'really mature' is not a phrase you'd otherwise associate with him.

Dan scores two out of five, if we're generous. He hedged his bets on the Guardians, but did correctly name Rocket Raccoon first as Andy's favorite. He also knew his partner's Trekkie tendencies. However, Andy's desire to write X-Men, *introduction to Marvel via* Amazing Spider-Man *and liking of a nice Stilton, escaped Dan's attention.*

Andy wants to be Rocket Raccoon when he grows up.

Andy on Dan

Andy Lanning

Who is Dan's favorite Guardian of the Galaxy?
Groot.

Which artist Dan has never worked with would he love to write for?
Richard Corben.

If Dan went to a super-hero costume party, who would he be?
Dr. Manhattan!

Which is it for Dan: Classic Battlestar Galactica or new Battlestar Galactica?
New.

What's Dan's favorite vegetable?
The humble potato?

Andy scores a disappointing one out of five. He correctly noted Dan's preference for new Battlestar, but was blissfully ignorant of Dan's feelings for Gamora, his appreciation of Kang's couture and his penchant for parsnips. Dan would have loved to have collaborated with John Buscema, and would also like to write for Howard Chaykin or Frank Quitely.

"You've probably realized by now that Dan and I have never met and wouldn't know the other if we fell over each other," admitted a defeated Andy.

— Jess Harrold

Dan enjoys writing Gamora the best.

DAN: The key one we'd love to write is Captain Marvel, because it's the other great Jim Starlin character we haven't had chance to get our hands on yet. As far as we're concerned, Starlin could do no wrong. But obviously, Mar-Vell's tied up with Marvel Earth continuity at the moment, so that makes it slightly harder. But maybe at some point…

ANDY: The cosmic universe is littered with throwaway characters that have popped up in various stories here, there and everywhere. If I can bring Tim Boo Ba back, it would be wonderful. We've got loads more toys to play with.

SPOTLIGHT: Lastly, when a reader turns the final page of *War of Kings*, how do you hope they will feel?

DAN: Amorous but flaccid.

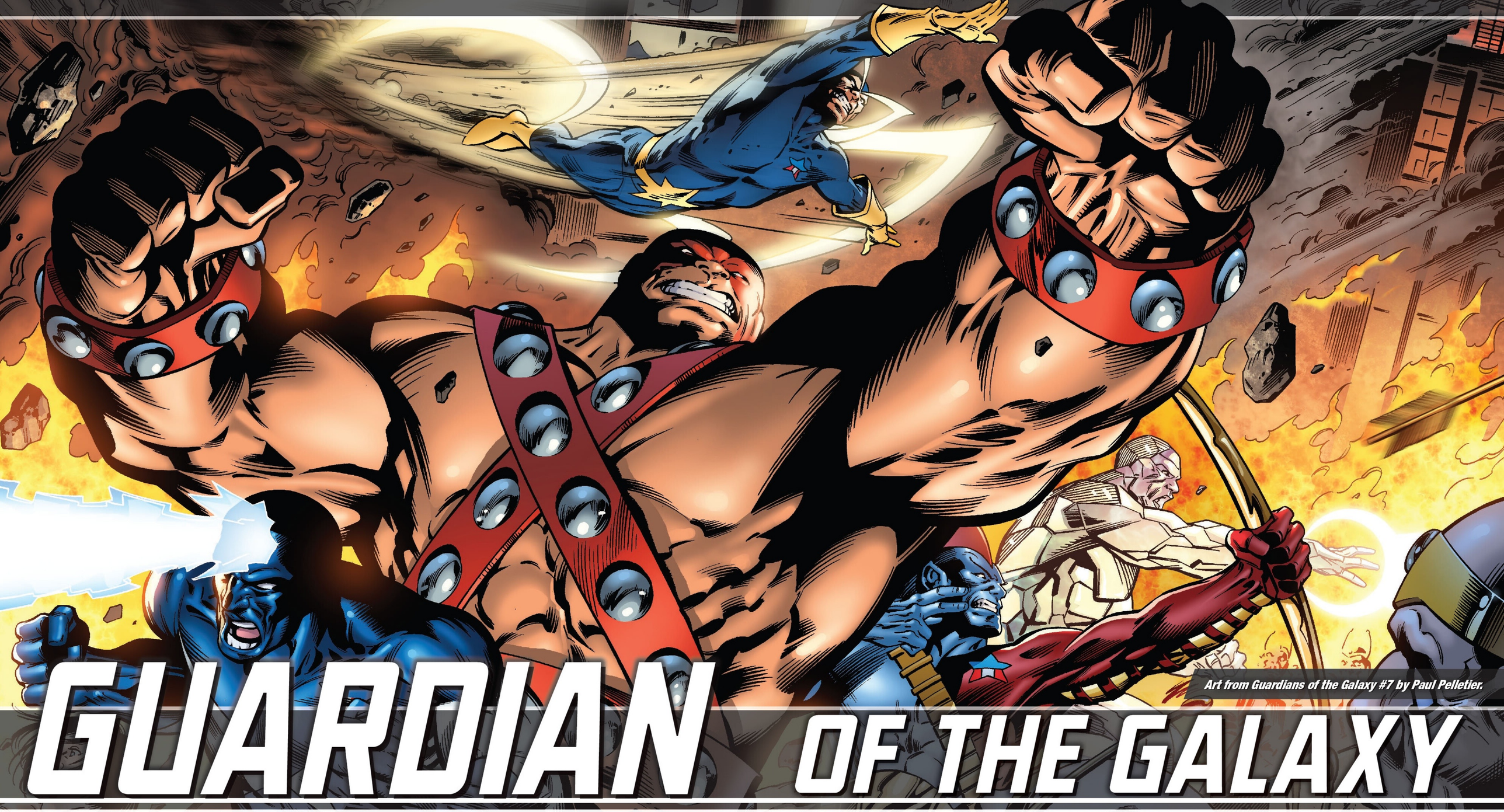
ANDY: Sturdy yet moist.

DAN: No, we hope they really, really enjoy the story and more particularly feel that a real story has been delivered with a beginning, a middle and an end, rather than a circular return to the status quo. I'd like to think there'll be a certain degree of shock, an Oh my God, I can't believe they did that, but I'm very glad they did."

ANDY: This is going to have a significant impact on the Marvel cosmic universe that will change things for good. At that point onwards, things are not going to be the same and people are going to want to stick around and see exactly what comes next. We really do open the boundaries of the universe, so hopefully more people will come on board and enjoy what we're doing.

99% of people who've read ANNIHILATION, NOVA, GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY – or any of the other cosmic comics DnA have been delivering – are on board and enjoying it! It's that 1% of holdouts waiting for Tim Boo Ba that are the problem. Until then, good luck to DnA and get back to work on your rousing stories in WAR OF KINGS!

EMPEROR VULCAN: One of the major players in *War of Kings*, the third Summers brother, Vulcan, claims dominion over the Shi'ar Empire. (Art from *X-Men: Kingbreaker #1* by Dustin Weaver.)



Art from Guardians of the Galaxy #7 by Paul Pelletier.

GUARDIAN OF THE GALAXY

Artist Paul Pelletier Is ROCKIN' THE COSMIC In War Of Kings!

By John Rhett Thomas and Dugan Trodglen

We're just gonna come right out and say it: The popular Paul Pelletier is a perspicacious penciler without peer! And just to prove we mean it, we're gonna stand up on Irving Forbush's coffee table and say it fast ten times in a row! Yes, we're that serious! Ever since we got to feast our eyes on the lush dynamism of his work on Fantastic Four (see *The New Fantastic Four* collected in HC and TPB), we were sold, and after seeing what he's done with DnA on *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *Annihilation: Conquest* and now *War of Kings*, he's one of the Spotlight office's fave artistes! (You saw right! *Artiste*!)

Before we preview some of his elegant pencil art from the first issue of *War of Kings*, we thought it proper to introduce you to the guy and give him a chance to field some questions of a cosmic origin. So stick with us through the earthbound words before we get to the out of this world art!

SPOTLIGHT: Right after a *Fantastic Four* run that included a big space adventure, you moved to *Nova*, to *Guardians of the Galaxy*, and now to *War of Kings*. Do you ever feel like you live in outer space? Are you surprised to have found yourself so closely associated with the cosmic corner of the Marvel Universe?

PAUL: Yeah, I always seem to be floating around in some cosmic craziness! I'm not that surprised, though. When I worked with CrossGen years ago, I penciled nearly 27 issues of *Negation*, which was a nutty sci-fi adventure comic book with super-hero tendencies. That was also when I first met Bill Rosemann, my current editor. It's not too surprising that when we hooked up again at Marvel, I'd be working on some kind of insane cosmic mayhem!

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of insane, three of the aforementioned books are authored by Marvel's beloved cosmic creators DnA (aka Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning). Are they pretty easy to work with, or even better, can you dish any dirt on this kooky pair?

PAUL: I'm not sure exactly how DnA conjure up these wacky storylines, but I can say this much about them: They're very easy to work with! It's great to know that every time I finish an issue, the next plot is ready and waiting with no time wasted. They're incredibly professional, which is fantastic when operating under a deadline. I feel very lucky to be working with them!

SPOTLIGHT: So, no dirt huh? Seriously, you've been

"I've always had a 'cartoony' edge to my art style, so drawing Rocket Raccoon in this cast of characters wasn't too strange."

– Artist Paul Pelletier

working with them for a while now. Is there anything about the process with them that is unique: Either the inspiration you get from their scripts or any other facet of your collaboration?

PAUL: Unique...? Not really. DnA simply supply me with inspired stories that push me hard to "up my game" with every single issue. There's no resting when working on one of their plots. It keeps me sharp!

SPOTLIGHT: Since *Annihilation* launched back in 2006, there's been a common thread underpinning all the stories. Has remaining partners with writers Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning made it easier to view what you've been doing as part of a specific larger tapestry?

PAUL: Sort of...but it doesn't help in trying to keep track of the fifty million characters I'll have to draw in these books!

SPOTLIGHT: You certainly do excel at these books that combine sci-fi and super hero. Are you conscious of mixing genres or as a storyteller is this sort of labeling all window dressing?

PAUL: Well, since it's sci-fi, there is a lot more room for creativity. I'm not restrained by "real world" situations. It allows me to play around with funky character designs and bizarre locales more so than "mainstream" comics. Besides, sci-fi and super heroes have been mixed together for decades. Lee and Kirby's *FF* is the perfect combination of the two. Some of the best stories in Marvel super-hero history are knee-deep in sci-fi; The Avengers Kree/Skrull War stuff, Silver Surfer, the Uncanny X-Men Phoenix Saga, and more recently, stuff like *Secret Invasion* and *Fantastic Four: The End*.

SPOTLIGHT: The first book in your adventure into the Abnett/Lanning Cosmic Corner was *Nova*, and your first storyline reintroduced the *New Mutants* character Warlock. It also used Warlock's fellow techno-organic race the Phalanx. I must say: Your take on them was absolutely breathtaking! What did you use as inspiration for rendering these seemingly difficult to draw creatures?

PAUL: Thanks for the compliment! I really tried to stay true to the work that Art Adams did with Warlock, waaaay back in the *X-Men/New Mutants* days. I loved the animated nature he gave Warlock and opened up many roads in how to deal with him. Very expressive stuff! Was he difficult to draw? Heck yeah! That's why I never drew him the same way twice. I just made sure that there was enough similarity to him from panel to panel so that readers would still recognize him. Just when I started getting the hang of drawing him, the story was over!

SPOTLIGHT: *Guardians of the Galaxy* is a book with a large cast, including a dog and a raccoon, and numerous strange alien background characters. A lot of the book takes place in the claustrophobic Knowhere space station where setting a large cast, particularly in a battle scene, seems like it would be tricky. What proved to be your biggest challenge with that comic?

WELCOME TO THE NEGATIVE ZONE: Blastaar reigns supreme in the post-Annihilus era of the NZ. (Art from *GOTG #7* by Pelletier.)

VANCE ASTRO: The legendary Guardian was recently found encased in ice with Cap's shield. Whassup?!?! (Art from *GOTG #2* by Pelletier.)

PAUL: Getting to know each character and how to draw them when there is such a big cast can be tricky. It always takes me a few issues to get used to a character, so it takes me a bit longer when I have a large team of them to worry about. It's always a challenge to give each character their moment when you're drawing a battle scene in which you have to establish the locale, worry about tech and hardware, and have to account for multiple heroes/villains fighting, talking and whatnot in each panel. It's quite a juggling act!

SPOTLIGHT: How weird is it drawing Rocket Raccoon in the middle of all of this? He is obviously supposed to stick out like a sore thumb visually, but that must be counter-intuitive to an artist.

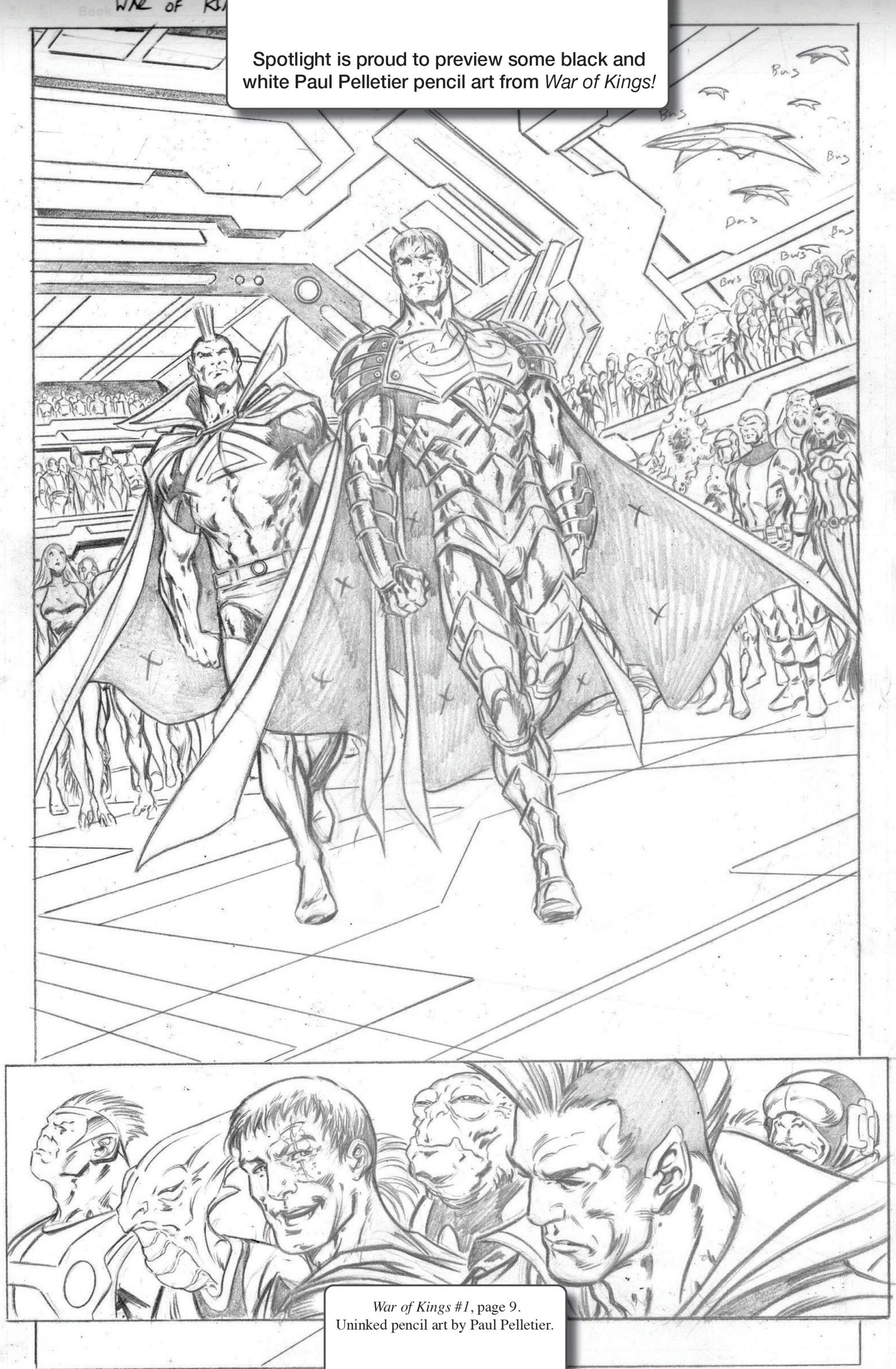
PAUL: Not really. I've always had a "cartoony" edge to my art style, so drawing Rocket Raccoon in this cast of characters wasn't too strange. I loved the way Tim Green drew him in his *Star-Lord* mini, so I tried to incorporate that same feeling when I drew him. Of course, just when I was really getting a grip on drawing him... *BAM*! I'm off to pencil *War of Kings*!

SPOTLIGHT: After *War of Kings* wraps up, what's next?

PAUL: I'm not sure yet. There's a strong chance that I'll be back on *Guardians of the Galaxy.* I would love to take a crack at drawing characters like Thor or Hulk, but...who knows what the future holds!?! Right now, I've got my hands full with *War of Kings*. I pray that the gods of Marvel Cosmic give me strength! I just hope that everyone who picks up *WOK* enjoys it as much as we have putting it together.

After seeing his recent work on FANTASTIC FOUR, Paul Pelletier became one of the Spotlight office's favorite artists! After taking a glimpse of his work on WAR OF KINGS, he might just make our Hall of Fame! You keep on blowing minds with your cosmic art, Paul, and we'll keep reading! See ya in WOK! ●

Spotlight is proud to preview some black and white Paul Pelletier pencil art from *War of Kings!*

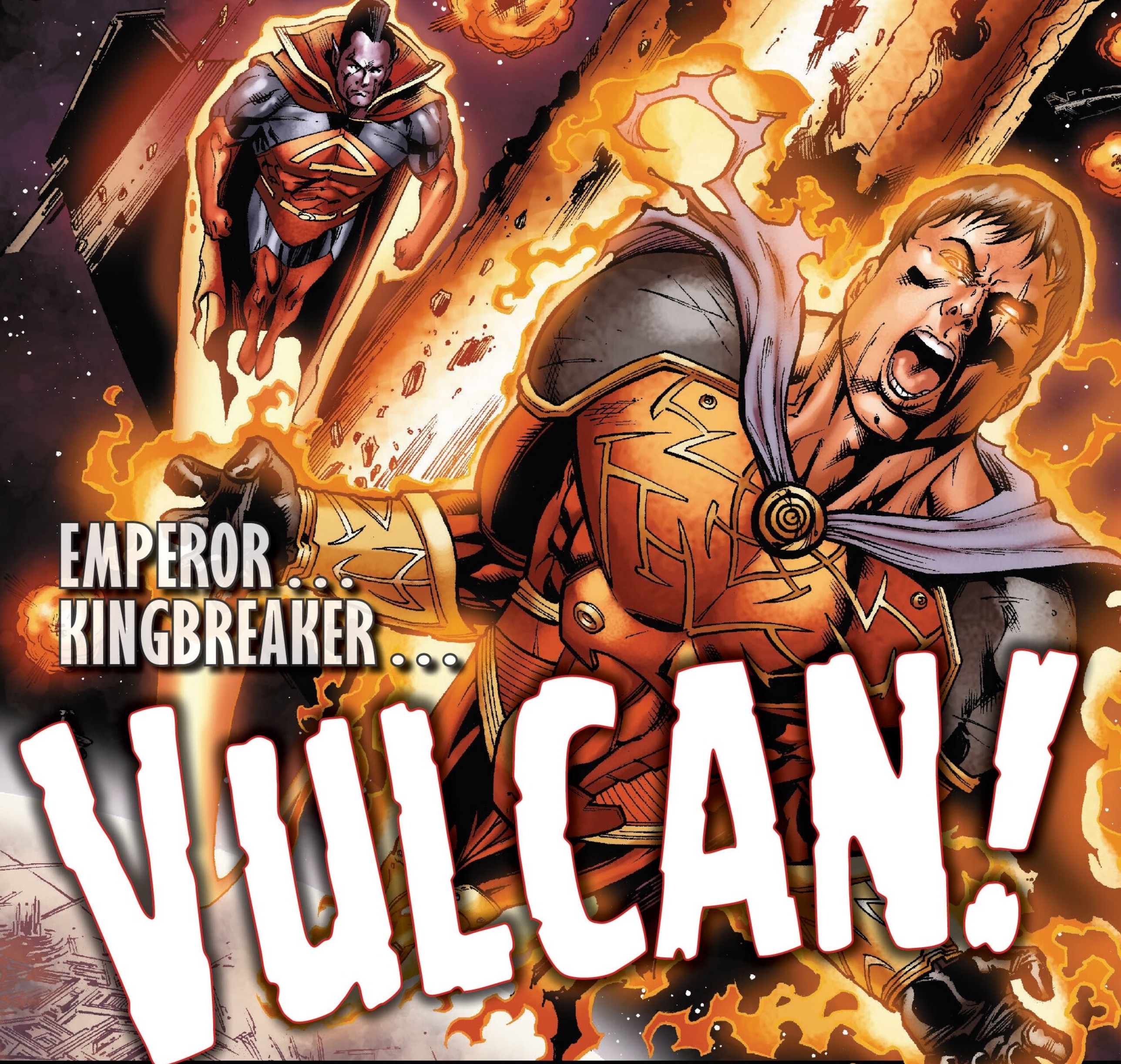


War of Kings #1, page 9.
Uninked pencil art by Paul Pelletier.

War of Kings #1, page 10.
Uninked pencil art by Paul Pelletier.

WAR OF KINGS 1 4

War of Kings #1, page 4.
Inked black and white pencils by Paul Pelletier.



Look Out Black Bolt. Marvel's Boldest, Brashest New Bad Guy Happens To Be A Summers Brother

By John Rhett Thomas

War of Kings pits Black Bolt, one of the most recognizable icons to Marvel faithful, against Vulcan, a brash newcomer to the House of Ideas' rich tapestry of characters. But who is this newbie on the Marvel scene, and what's the regal head of the Inhumans have to fear? Ed Brubaker brought Vulcan to life in the pages of *X-Men: Deadly Genesis*, a scintillating five-issue limited series that introduced Gabriel Summers as the long lost brother to Cyclops and Havok. He was so long lost, in fact, that nobody remembered he ever existed! (Well, except for a few folks, like Charles Xavier, but you gotta read the story for more details!) Shortly after his revival, Vulcan began a rampage of revenge that took the life of Banshee and eventually led to the stars, where he ran roughshod over the elite guardians of the Shi'ar Empire, eventually wresting control of it and becoming its leader. If a guy can go from being in a coma to leading an entire galactic empire, you know he's got some power behind him!

That brings us to Christopher Yost, one of Marvel's hot young writers who has picked up the story of Vulcan where Brubaker left off, spinning two consecutive mini-series of patented, X-Men-style, space operatics. In *X-Men: Emperor Vulcan*, Yost led readers through Vulcan's solidifying grasp on Shi'ar power and his confrontations with the new Starjammers led by his brother Havok. And in the current series, *X-Men: Kingbreaker*, Yost finds that the revenge fantasies harbored in the heart of Vulcan are given free reign now that the emperor has his brother in captivity. It's an exciting, adrenaline-filled prelude to the big action in *War of Kings*, and we pulled Yost aside to get his take on writing the other "King" in the *War of Kings* crossover.

"WHILE OTHER CHARACTERS MAY HAVE DUG DEEP AND RISEN ABOVE IT ALL TO BE A HERO, VULCAN DIDN'T. VULCAN WENT THE OTHER WAY."

– X-Men: Kingbreaker writer Christopher Yost

SPOTLIGHT: Vulcan was first revealed as the third Summers brother in Ed Brubaker's *X-Men: Deadly Genesis* and then spent twelve issues of Bru's *Uncanny X-Men* seeking vengeance against the Shi'ar. What was your sense of the character of Vulcan when you inherited him in Emperor Vulcan?

CHRISTOPHER: I always saw Vulcan as the victim, to a point. Horrible things were done to him, but he still wanted to be a hero. And when he got his shot, he was betrayed by Charles Xavier of all people. And while other characters may have dug deep and risen above it all to *be* a hero, Vulcan didn't. Vulcan went the other way. Which I thought was a pretty great thing. He comes from a line of heroes, but the anger and betrayal and loss is too much for him, and he chooses differently.

SPOTLIGHT: Is he still pretty much the same guy as we enter *War of Kings*? If not, what have you done to adapt his character?

CHRISTOPHER: I think emotionally, he's in a different place. He's succeeded in some great ways: He's taken over the Shi'ar Empire, and earned the Shi'ar people's love. But in other, possibly more important ways, he's failed. He couldn't break Havok. The Starjammers are still alive. The people he cares about most in some ways, they think he's the villain, not the hero. As he enters *War of Kings*, he's going to be in a dark place, worse than ever before.

SPOTLIGHT: I loved the reveal late in Bru's *Uncanny* run where it was noted that Vulcan had the maturity level of a 15-year old. It put all his past behavior in a proper context as adolescent rage, almost on the level of a temper tantrum except with cosmic power backing it up. Is he still in that same mindset as you write him, or has he evolved a bit since then?

CHRISTOPHER: He's a character who can't really identify what he wants, so he goes for the easy goal: Revenge on all those who failed him, on those who hurt him or betrayed him. Eventually he may get to the point of *"Now what*?" and he won't have an answer. He doesn't have the maturity to identify it. In *X-Men: Emperor Vulcan* and *X-Men: Kingbreaker*, he's all external, no introspection. And of course, he's playing King. That appeals to him...being the most powerful, having the hot girl; these are immature things.

KORVUS: The new Starjammer is bringing it with his Phoenix-powered broadsword! (Art from *XM:K #1* by Weaver.)

GABRIEL SUMMERS: Vulcan's first appearance, as the bent on revenge brother to Cyclops and Havok, was in Ed Brubaker and Trevor Hairsine's *X-Men: Deadly Genesis*. (Cover art to *Deadly Genesis #5* by Marc Silvestri.)

SPOTLIGHT: Vulcan killed his father without remorse, he's tortured his brother, Alex, and we know all of the nastiness he was capable of in *Deadly Genesis*. Yet, he's still a Summers brother, and his back story has a pretty deep vein of tragedy to it. Is there any redemption available to him in the future, perhaps through *War of Kings*? Or is he pretty solidly cast as a villain right now?

CHRISTOPHER: I'm going with "villain." At every turn, he's taken the villain's path and there's a point of no return. Killing his father and Banshee are that point. Even if he saves the universe tomorrow, he's still that guy. He and Havok teamed up to defeat the Scy'ar, and enemy race that threatened the M'kraan Crystal, but Vulcan turned right around and betrayed Havok, then committed genocide to prove himself to the Shi'ar. Professor Xavier even on his *worst* day would not approve.

SPOTLIGHT: One of the cool new characters from the Vulcan storyline is Korvus. Can you tell us about him and if he's going to gain more prominence through *War of Kings*? Dig that sword!

CHRISTOPHER: Check out *Kingbreaker* for a turning point with Korvus. When he enters the *War of Kings*, he's going to be a changed character.

SPOTLIGHT: In addition to your previous work on *New X-Men*, your current work on *X-Force*, and your maintenance of post-Brubaker Vulcan/Havok and Starjammers stories, it seems you have a pretty solid lock on X-Men Universe turf. But can we possibly expect you to stick around in the cosmic corner of Marvel once *War of Kings* winds down?

CHRISTOPHER: Fingers crossed! I love X-Men, I love space... it's a dream come true being involved with this. So assuming at least one Starjammer survives, hopefully I'll be writing him (or her).

X-MEN: KINGBREAKER continues through its fourth issue, when it makes way for the WAR OF KINGS event series. For more exciting X-action by Christopher Yost, be sure to check out X-FORCE, an ongoing series spun out of the hugely successful Messiah CompleX event! ●

DARKHAWK:

THE NEW DAWN

SPOTLIGHT DELVES INTO WHAT MAKES THE WAR OF KINGS STAR SO COOL

By Chris Arrant

It's a new day for the man known as Darkhawk. After his hot debut in 1991 and a fifty issue run of his own series, the character has remained largely in the background until recent resurgence in the pages of various Marvel comic books. Beginning last year with his role in the ensemble limited series *Loners*, he then appeared in the ongoing series *Nova* in a new role protecting Project: P.E.G.A.S.U.S. And now, Chris Powell and his superhuman alter ego are taking things into space with a pivotal role in the *War of Kings* event.

War of Kings: Darkhawk is a two-issue limited series launching in February 2009 courtesy of writer C.B. Cebulski and artist Harvey Tolibao. We know it's Darkhawk, and it takes place under the "War of Kings" banner – that's in the title – but what's it really about?

"I can't give you too much without giving plot points and story lines away, but let me say this is going to be a real firecracker of a series," said writer C.B. Cebulski. "We're packing so much bang into the pages that we've been given that we are going to blow readers' minds. Darkhawk and his origin will be shaken. The mythos of his amulet and armor will be called into question and turned on their ear. We touch on everything, as well as his relationship with his parents, his brothers and the Loners."

This isn't Cebulski's first trip around the park with the character; Cebulski was the writer of the *Loners* series that featured the Darkhawk character trying his best to beat the super-hero habit. "C.B. did such a great job of exploring Chris Powell's struggles in the pages of *Loner*s," said editor Bill Rosemann, "That he reminded many of us just how cool Darkhawk could be."

As the recent issue of *Nova* shows, he's back in the super-hero job full-time with his new role as the security chief of Project: P.E.G.A.S.U.S. But the real question is how he goes from being stationed in a government facility deep in the mountains to the outer reaches of space.

"That's really the crux of this series, to get him from point A to point B," explained Cebulski. "[*Nova* writers] Dan Abnett and Andy

"(Abnett and Lanning) hatched some amazing ideas that revealed the shocking connection that Darkhawk has to the events of *War of Kings*."

– Editor Bill Rosemann

"The crime rate was pretty high in New York at the time, so the idea that a cop's son would want to use the Darkhawk amulet as an 'edge against crime' was topical," said Fingeroth. "Also, I think there was a general feeling that Marvel needed a 'Spider-Man for the '90s' – a teen super hero new to the game – and Darkhawk was designed to play that role."

One of Darkhawk's strong points has always been the costume design. Dubbed by some as a "robotic Batman," it was originally designed by Keith Pollard before original series artist Mike Manley put his own stamp on it; and that became Darkhawk. The dark armored suit with the hawkish helmet gives a menacing look, and with the retractable glider wings it offers a unique silhouette. Add in the grappling-hook claw-cable on his right arm, and you've got an armored hero that has more mobility than your standard metal-wrapped warrior. The artist of the upcoming series is carrying on that design and making it look as fresh as the day it was made.

Lanning have had Darkhawk kicking butt in *Nova* and they have definite plans for him in *War of Kings*. After discussing matters with Marvel and editor Bill Rosemann, they were all kind enough to give me the opportunity to go in and tie up some of the loose ends that were left over with Darkhawk from his *Loners* days before he goes off on his grand cosmic adventure, opening a new chapter in his life."

Just as *Annihilation* served as a "re"-launching pad for Nova (who now stars in his own acclaimed series), *War of Kings* is where Darkhawk will be given the chance to regain some notoriety in the Marvel Universe. But where did he come from originally?

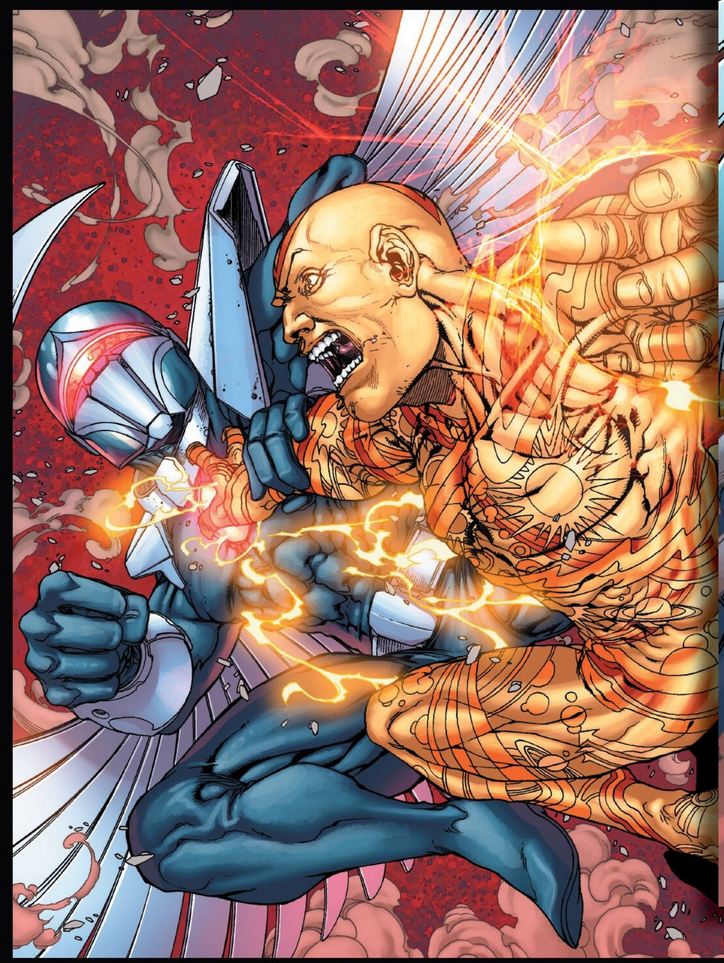
As far as powers go, Darkhawk owes it all to the extraterrestrial amulet he wears that transforms him into the Darkhawk suit. In that, he has enhanced physical abilities that include strength, as well as energy blasts from his chest amulet. The suit also has mechanical attributes with retractable glider wings and the previously mentioned grappling hook. Think the gadgets of Batman with the powers of Green Lantern mixed in.

Darkhawk originally debuted in his own self-titled series *Darkhawk* #1 in 1991 as a normal New York City teenager who found an amulet that gave him the powers that remain with him today. His creation was part of an initiative at Marvel to generate interesting new characters, said original writer Danny Fingeroth.

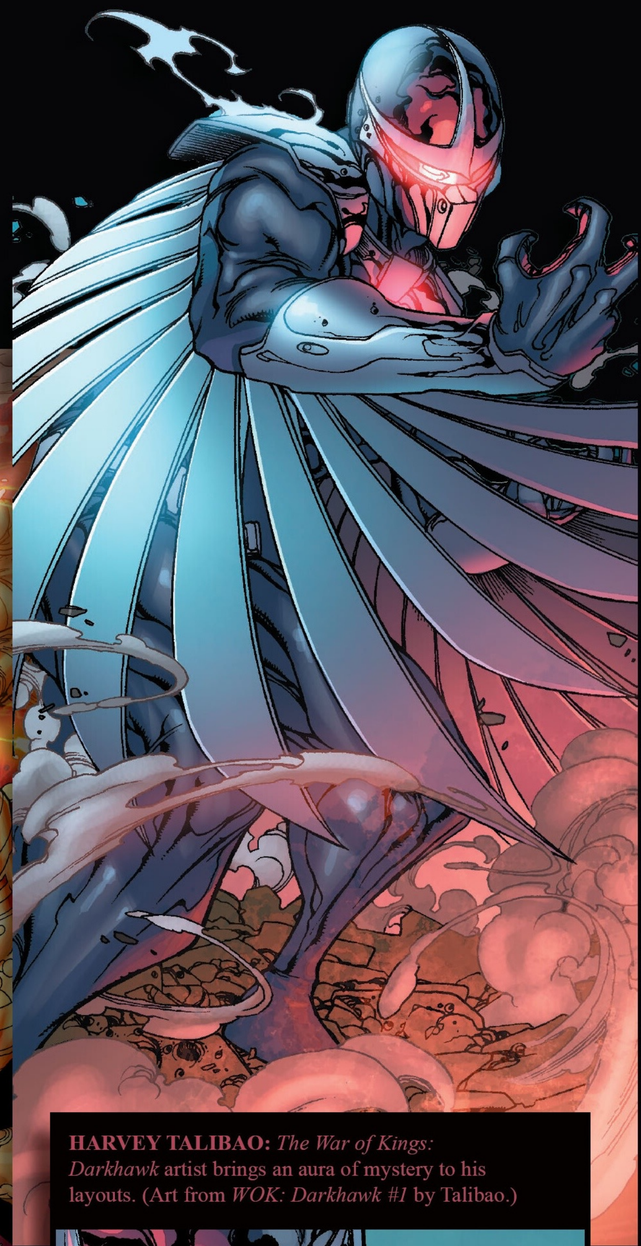
ONLY THE LONELY: Darkhawk was a key part of the angst-filled ensemble of C.B. Cebulski's cult fave *Loners*. (Art from *Loners #1* by Karl Moline.)

"He's the Spider-Man of the '90s..." – Writer and Darkhawk fan Robert Kirkman

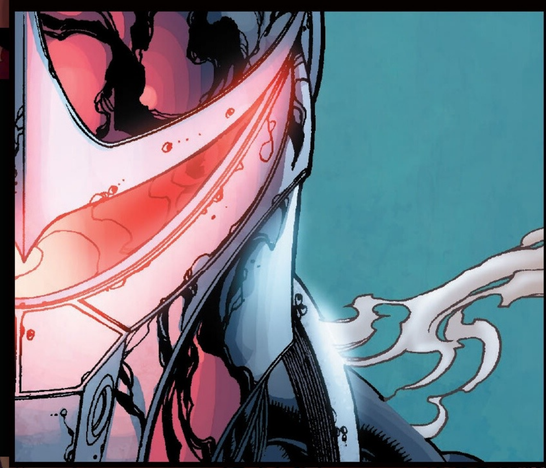
LEAGUE OF LOSERS: Darkhawk leads a team of lovable losers, including Dagger and Gravity, in Robert Kirkman's *Marvel Team-Up #15-18*. (Art by Paco Medina.)



VERSUS VECTOR: Darkhawk takes on the most powerful of the U-Foes in the first issue of his *WOK* mini. (Art from *WOK: Darkhawk #1* by Harvey Talibao.)



HARVEY TALIBAO: *The War of Kings: Darkhawk* artist brings an aura of mystery to his layouts. (Art from *WOK: Darkhawk #1* by Talibao.)



In addition to his own series, he also joined in adventures with the New Warriors, the West Coast Avengers and most recently the Loners. He's a formidable hero, having gone toe-to-toe with Venom, the Hobgoblin and the Punisher.

"I really enjoyed being able to tell the character's developing saga from beginning to end over the course of over four years," Fingeroth explained. "That's a rare thing."

Fast forward to the present day and Darkhawk is no longer a new kid on the Marvel block but a proper adult with responsibilities. Powell is in charge of security at Project: P.E.G.A.S.U.S., while still dating Loners teammate Turbo. What led to his full-fledged return to his own comic? Good question.

"It was a combination of events," explained editor Bill Rosemann. "First, Dan and Andy (a.k.a. DnA) did a great job of bringing Darkhawk back the forefront of the Marvel U. in *Nova* and cementing him as a compelling supporting character. Second, the reader response made us quickly realize that Chris Powell was ready to once again fly from a supporting to a starring role. Finally, DnA hatched some amazing ideas that revealed the shocking connection that Darkhawk has to the events of *War of Kings*."

As Cebulski has said, this new limited series will chart Darkhawk's future by looking – and questioning – his past. "In fact, while you may not realize it while you read it, one action in *Secret Invasion: War of Kings* begins the destruction and transformation of Darkhawk's world."

Cebulski's interest in the character shows, with multiple times writing the character. The writer himself admits that he's followed the character since his first issue. Why does he like him so much?

"What makes Darkhawk cool is his unpredictability," said Cebulski. "Chris had to figure everything out for himself, from the day he found the Darkhawk amulet and the armor. He never had any of the answers. Hell, he never knew any of the questions he should even be asking.

"There was no Uncle Ben telling him, 'With great power there must also come great responsibility', like Spider-Man had. He was from a somewhat broken home and his parents weren't really around, so he didn't have a lot of guidance. He had to figure it all out on his own. He acted and reacted by trusting his gut. And he did what he thought was right, even when it wasn't always right," explained Cebulski.

"Darkhawk was a true teen hero in that regard; he acted on instinct, followed his heart, screwed up from time to time, and eventually learned from his mistakes. Or thought he did. That's what made him cool in readers' eyes: We never knew what he was going to do next. And we still don't."

The character made a real impact with readers at the time, from our own C.B. Cebulski to other writers who have tackled the character over time. Take Robert Kirkman for example.

"Erik Larsen talks about how Nova was his Spider-Man... he was someone with an accessible first issue that you could read and follow from the start. For kids of the '90s, that was Darkhawk," said Kirkman, who recently wrote the character in *Marvel Team-Up*. "He's the Spider-Man of the '90s, and that's something that's really cool."

As for Darkhawk's future after the conclusion of *War of Kings: Darkhawk* in March, that's up to you, says editor Bill Rosemann. "It's all in the hands of the readers. If they want it (and if Darkhawk survives *War of Kings*), we will do it!"

WAR OF KINGS: DARKHAWK is a two-issue limited series that premieres in February. In fact, loyal Spotlight readers, it just might be on a shelf at your local comic shop. It was due to hit the street a few week's before Marvel Spotlight: War of Kings, so if it's not sold out, call up your comic vendor of choice and have them reserve you a copy!

THERE'S A PLACE FOR US

Marvel's Most Fascinating Super-Powered Subculture Takes To The Stars To Find A Place To Call Home

By Sheila Johnson

Art from *Fantastic Four #240* by John Byrne.

The Marvel Universe is filled with gregarious characters that are known just as well within that universe as they are outside of it. Super heroes such as Ms. Marvel and Iron Man have their own press agents. Dazzler was a bona fide rock star, adored by millions of fans. And Johnny Storm? Any comic book reader familiar with the Fantastic Four knows how much the Human Torch just loves the glow of the limelight. Far beyond the reach of even these near-mythical personalities, however, another society of individuals with superhuman abilities has quietly developed, advancing itself far beyond human technology yet for the most part remaining isolated. The members of this society are known as the Inhumans.

Led by Black Bolt, the stoic king with a voice more powerful than a hydrogen bomb, the Inhumans have, in recent years, found themselves interacting more with the world beyond the protective borders and barriers surrounding their beloved home city, Attilan. From their early encounters with the Fantastic Four to Black Bolt's meetings with the other members of the Illuminati, the Inhumans have integrated themselves into the lives of Marvel's most-read characters perhaps even more thoroughly than some members of this notoriously reclusive race would have ever cared to. Yet in this spring's *War of Kings* event, the Inhumans will take this even further and fight the ever-expanding Shi'ar empire, intending to prove once and for all that reclusiveness is not the same as weakness.

Marvel Spotlight takes a look at Black Bolt and other members of the Inhuman royal family, examining the roles they've played in the past and the ways that those roles will affect the colossal, interstellar battles in *War of Kings*.

ROYAL FAMILY: The Inhumans, from left to right: Triton, Gorgon, Karnak, Black Bolt, Medusa and Crystal. (Cover to *Inhumans (1998) #1* by Jae Lee.)

EARLY HISTORY AND FIRST APPEARANCES

Surprisingly, the first Inhuman to make an appearance was not Black Bolt the king, but Medusa, a stunningly beautiful woman with red hair that was incredibly long – and very much alive. Yet as readers saw in *Fantastic Four #36*, Medusa was then associated not with the Inhumans but with a gang of human criminals calling themselves "the Frightful Four." Only through a story arc beginning in 1965's *Fantastic Four #44* and continuing through issue #48 were the rest of the Inhumans uncovered and the reason for Medusa's flight from their secret sanctuary revealed.

The Inhumans that were presented in this story arc – Black Bolt, Medusa, Gorgon, Crystal, Karnak, Triton, and Maximus – were considered royalty, members (or soon-to-be members) of the Inhumans' ruling family. At that time, it was Maximus who was in power, having wrenched the crown from his brother Black Bolt, then later commanding that Medusa, Black Bolt's true love, be betrothed to him instead. The Inhuman fighter Gorgon, ever loyal to the bearer of the crown despite his true respect for Black Bolt, retrieved Medusa after she had made her escape to the human world but found himself deceived, as he had not known that Medusa would be forced to marry a man she did not love. When Gorgon and Medusa returned to the Inhumans' hidden realm on Earth, however, their kin were with them – and the Fantastic Four soon followed (complete with a love-struck Johnny Storm fawning over Crystal, Medusa's sister).

Readers already knew how the Fantastic Four had received their powers; through this story as well as later tales, they also came to know how the Inhumans received theirs. The Inhumans were revealed to be spawned by the Kree, the result of the Kree's genetic experiments on early human inhabitants of Earth. As Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning, the writers of *War of Kings*, explain, "In their history, the Inhumans were created by the Kree to become their Praetorian fighting force," but were abandoned for unknown reasons. Left on Earth to lead their own lives, the Inhumans became masters of their own evolution by developing a chemical called Terrigen that, when an Inhuman was exposed to it, would unlock the secrets of the Inhuman's genetic code

and cause each one to develop a unique superhuman ability and often a strikingly *inhuman* appearance.

The results of that development were fully visible in each Inhuman who stood against Maximus in *Fantastic Four #47*: Medusa, with her prehensile hair; Gorgon, whose strong cloven hooves could smash and shatter any surface; Karnak, who could detect the weakness of any person or object and attack with ease; Crystal, with her mastery of the four elements; the then-captive Triton, a mighty amphibious being; and Black Bolt, whose voice was so powerful that he could level a city with a whisper. Together they stood and with the Fantastic Four they fought, and finally, Black Bolt took the crown that was rightfully his back from Maximus and placed it on his own head.

The battle caused the Inhumans to think that, perhaps, they belonged among the humans, and it marked the beginning of increased interaction with human (and superhuman) society. Since the Inhumans' first appearance, they have continued to work alongside the Fantastic Four and have helped the Avengers and the X-Men, with Crystal and Medusa even joining human super-teams for short periods. Yet within their own closed society, their laws keep them in a rigid caste system arranged according to genetic superiority, with strict preventions from marrying outside of their race. Their exchanges with the outside world are tentative because of this, and the balance between introversion and extroversion is a difficult one to maintain. And as with any society, the responsibility for this balance falls most heavily on the shoulders of the leader.

"Under his stoic rule ...he's taught them to endure. Now he will teach them to triumph."

— DnA on Black Bolt and the Inhumans in *War of Kings*

ROYAL ROMANCE: The bond between Black Bolt and his queen, Medusa, has kept the Inhumans from splintering through the years. (Art from *Secret Invasion: Inhumans #4* by Tom Raney.)

BLACK BOLT, THE KING

Throughout most of the Inhumans' history (which, in Marvel continuity, begins ages before the recorded history of man), the people of Attilan have lived in their hidden refuge in relative peace. The reign of Black Bolt, however, has proven to be one of the most tumultuous periods in that history. During that time, Black Bolt has been exiled and has regained his crown from Maximus. Additionally, in 2000's limited *Inhumans* series written by Paul Jenkins and drawn by Jae Lee, Black Bolt had the entire city of Attilan moved from its location in the Atlantic to the Himalayas to protect its scientific secrets, and in a later limited series helmed by Carlos Pacheco and Rafael Marin, he saw his subjects enslaved by Ronan the Accuser, the militant Kree who sought to reclaim the fighting force his ancestors created long ago. Despite the upheaval, however, the Inhumans remain loyal to their true king.

"Black Bolt has always protected and guided the Inhumans through their trials and tribulations," explain Abnett and Lanning. "Under his stoic rule, they have retained their nobility and honor in the face of those who fear and mistrust them. He's taught them to endure. Now [in *War of Kings*], he will teach them to triumph."

It is a lesson that Black Bolt knows well. Marvel's recent *Secret Invasion* event exposed the Black Bolt who had

SILENT WAR: Frazer Irving's impressionistic art portrays the desolation of an Attilan laid low by the Inhumans' war with the humans of Earth. (Art from *Silent War #6* by Frazer Irving.)

been meeting with the other members of the Illuminati as a shape-shifting Skrull impostor. The four-issue *Secret Invasion: Inhumans* series expanded upon this by showing that the real Black Bolt had been captured and replaced on the way to one such clandestine meeting some time before the *World War Hulk* story line. The Skrulls had done so intending to use Black Bolt and the strength of his world-leveling voice as their ultimate weapon.

Abnett and Lanning hope to turn this humiliating abduction into one of Black Bolt's strengths. "Black Bolt simply isn't going to take it any more. He's leading the Inhumans into a new era of proactive vigor. Whereas before, they have always endured what has come their way, now they are embarking on active destiny. They are going to reclaim their heritage."

This attitude promises to prove helpful when the Inhumans encounter the empire-absorbing Shi'ar. "Black Bolt will not let the Shi'ar impede the Inhumans' progress – and Vulcan is expanding the Shi'ar's empire wherever he can. This will set them on a collision course neither will back down from," Abnett and Lanning promise. "Black Bolt probably hasn't considered Vulcan particularly, but he will not shrink from a fight if their paths conflict. Black Bolt has unleashed the Inhumans' full potential and woe betide anyone who gets in their way."

Yet before Black Bolt could be in a position to so influence the course of the Inhumans' destiny, he had to be rescued and freed from the Skrulls. The climax of *Secret Invasion: Inhumans* saw a force of those most dedicated to Black Bolt do exactly that and proved that the old maxim is true: A king is nothing without the love of his queen.

MEDUSA, THE QUEEN

Back in *Fantastic Four #36*, Medusa hardly seemed like a character that would be loving and loyal to anyone, but the later revelation that she had fled the Inhumans' sanctuary to avoid marrying anyone other than her beloved demonstrated the depth of her affection and respect for Black Bolt. Later storylines laid open the depths of these sentiments. In the 2000 series, her distinguishing trait – her hair – was shorn from her head while she implemented a secret plan of Black Bolt's devising, and in the *Secret Invasion: Inhumans* run, it was she who decided to leave Attilan with a small contingent while the city was being attacked by Skrulls and go to find her husband.

Most importantly, however, she serves as Black Bolt's voice. A king who keeps himself silent would be able to exert only so much power, but with Medusa understanding his thoughts and wishes and interpreting them for all to hear, he is able to lead his subjects toward the great heights he hopes for them to reach.

Black Bolt's abduction could have compromised that; while he was imprisoned, the Skrulls revealed to him that Medusa had spoken to the impostor of intimate secrets and had also slept with him. Because of the strength of the bond between king and queen, though, this will become a point in *War of Kings* from which the couple will move forward.

"Medusa is becoming very driven," say Abnett and Lanning. "She shares her husband's ambitions and determination. She is privately desperate to prove her loyalties, having shared her bed and her confidences with a Skrull impostor. More than ever, she will become Black Bolt's voice."

That voice will fill the ears of all of those who fought for Black Bolt – and even those who did not.

"She is privately desperate to prove her loyalties, having shared her bed and her confidences with a Skrull impostor."

— DnA on Medusa

LADRONN: Four glorious covers adorned the four-issue 2000 limited series *Inhumans*, featuring Black Bolt, Medusa, Karnak, Gorgon, Triton and their foe Ronan the Accuser. (Cover art by Ladrönn.)

THE ROYAL FAMILY

Without subjects, what purpose would a king have? The members of the Inhumans' ruling clan accept Black Bolt's word as law, but beyond that, they also counsel him, comfort him – and care for him.

One of the people whom Black Bolt trusts most among those in his inner circle is Karnak, who has the uncanny ability to detect any flaw in an object or foe. This gift was what led Karnak to be the one other person along with Medusa to be trusted with Black Bolt's plan to relocate Attilan in the 2000 series. As Abnett and Lanning see it, "Karnak's abilities make him an extremely able and perceptive strategist and advisor. Black Bolt trusts him to point out any flaw in his plans." This is a role that he will continue to play in *War of Kings*. "Karnak is Black Bolt's voice of reason and keeps him grounded when others may be impulsive or rash."

Among those who may be considered impulsive or rash is Crystal, Medusa's sister, the member of the royal family who has most desired to experience life outside of Attilan. She fell for Johnny Storm upon their first meeting and later ignored Inhuman law to marry the mutant Quicksilver (a marriage that has since been annulled). Yet in the course of *Secret Invasion: Inhumans*, she accepted the duties that Medusa said were hers as a member of the Inhumans' ruling family and agreed to marry Ronan the Accuser in exchange for the Inhumans' use of Kree resources to free Black Bolt. In contrast to her earlier behavior, the attitude that Crystal currently espouses is one of responsibility. "Crystal isn't too keen on the idea (of marrying Ronan)," Abnett and Lanning explain, "But as the daughter of a royal dynasty she understands the duties and obligations of the privileged. This is a symbolic wedding, a marriage of two great houses, and it has nothing to do with personal feelings." Symbolic though the wedding may be, in the face of cosmic conflict, it promises to have an influence over events.

Any event that takes place on that cosmic scale is bound to incorporate a number of characters; with a group such as the Inhumans, it's almost expected. In *War of Kings*, even Triton, the water-specialized Inhuman, will have his part in the conflict. "Triton is a formidable warrior and, like his brethren, will play a dynamic role in the upcoming war," Abnett and Lanning pledge, a role that will likely involve the impressive Kree-modified weapons he received in *Secret Invasion: Inhumans*. Gorgon, the perennial heavy and battlefield veteran, has again been enlisted to stomp the Inhumans' antagonists into submission, and even Maximus, who was redeemed at the end of *Secret Invasion: Inhumans* by his ability to spot impending danger, will be allowed to contribute to the struggle by designing weaponry.

"In a story of this scale, with a cast this big," Abnett and Lanning say, "the trick is to make sure the main players all get their moment to shine. We're trying to engineer memorable character moments and story lines as well as creating exciting sequences to showcase their powers and abilities."

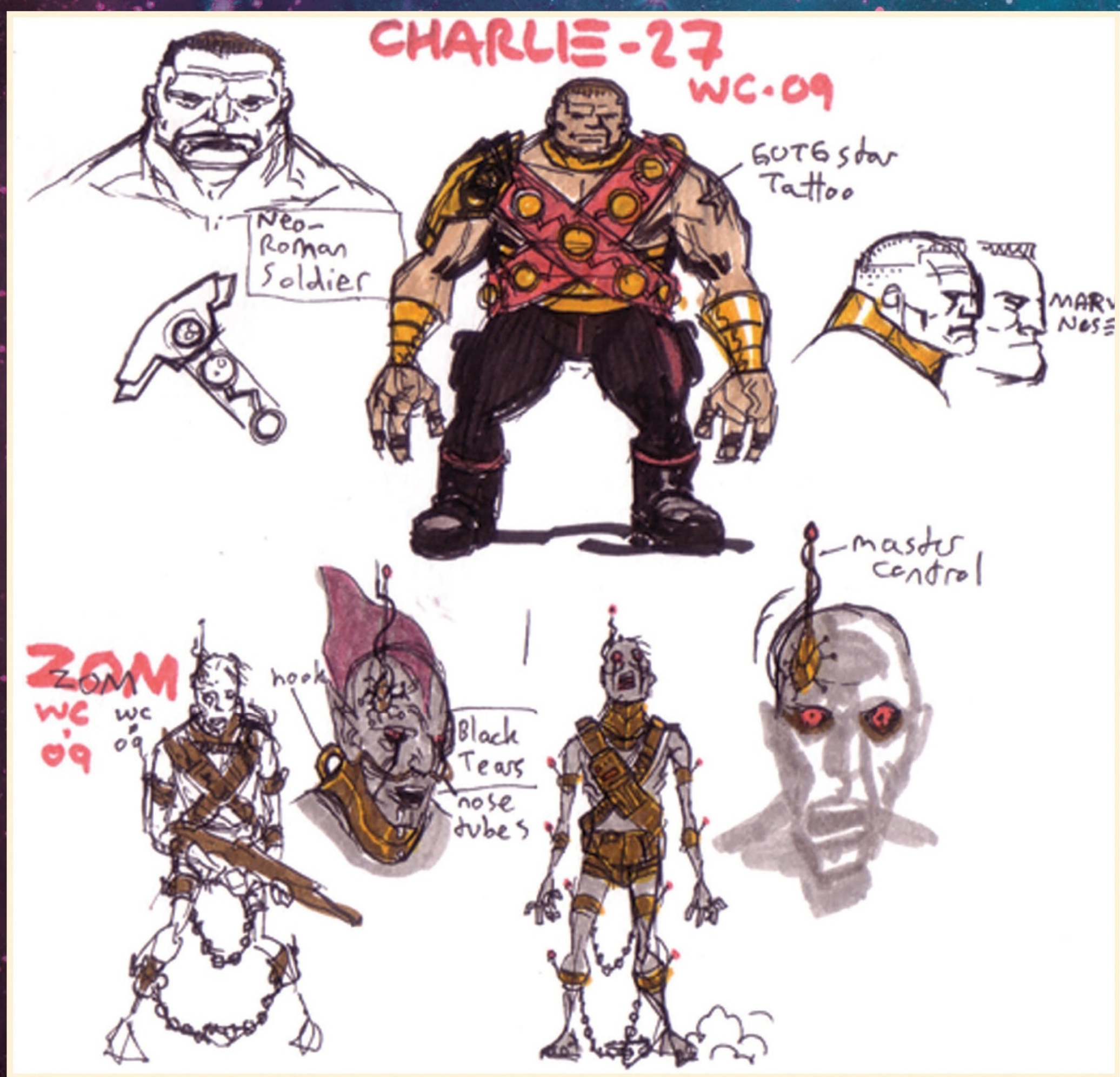
It's a tall order to be sure, but one made slightly easier when the writers realize how distinct and unusual the Inhumans look, even when standing among the other remarkable denizens of the Marvel Universe. Abnett, Lanning and their cast of Inhumans will have their chance to stand out when War of Kings debuts this March.

SKRULL SLUGFEST: Black Bolt puts an end to his Skrull captivity with a nice left uppercut. (Art from *SI: Inhumans #4* by Raney.)

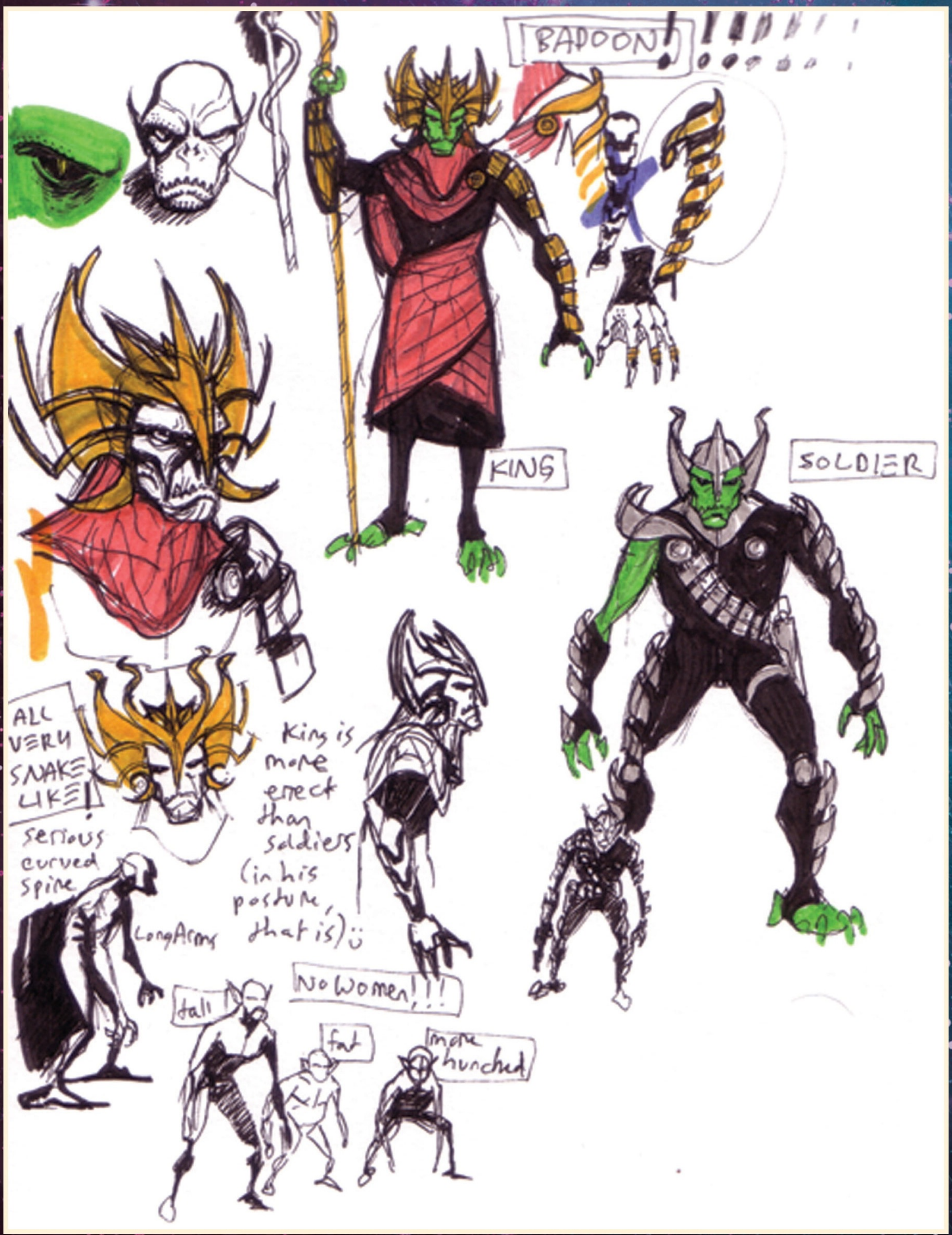
Guardians of the Galaxy #17 70th Anniversary frame variant by MIKE PERKINS

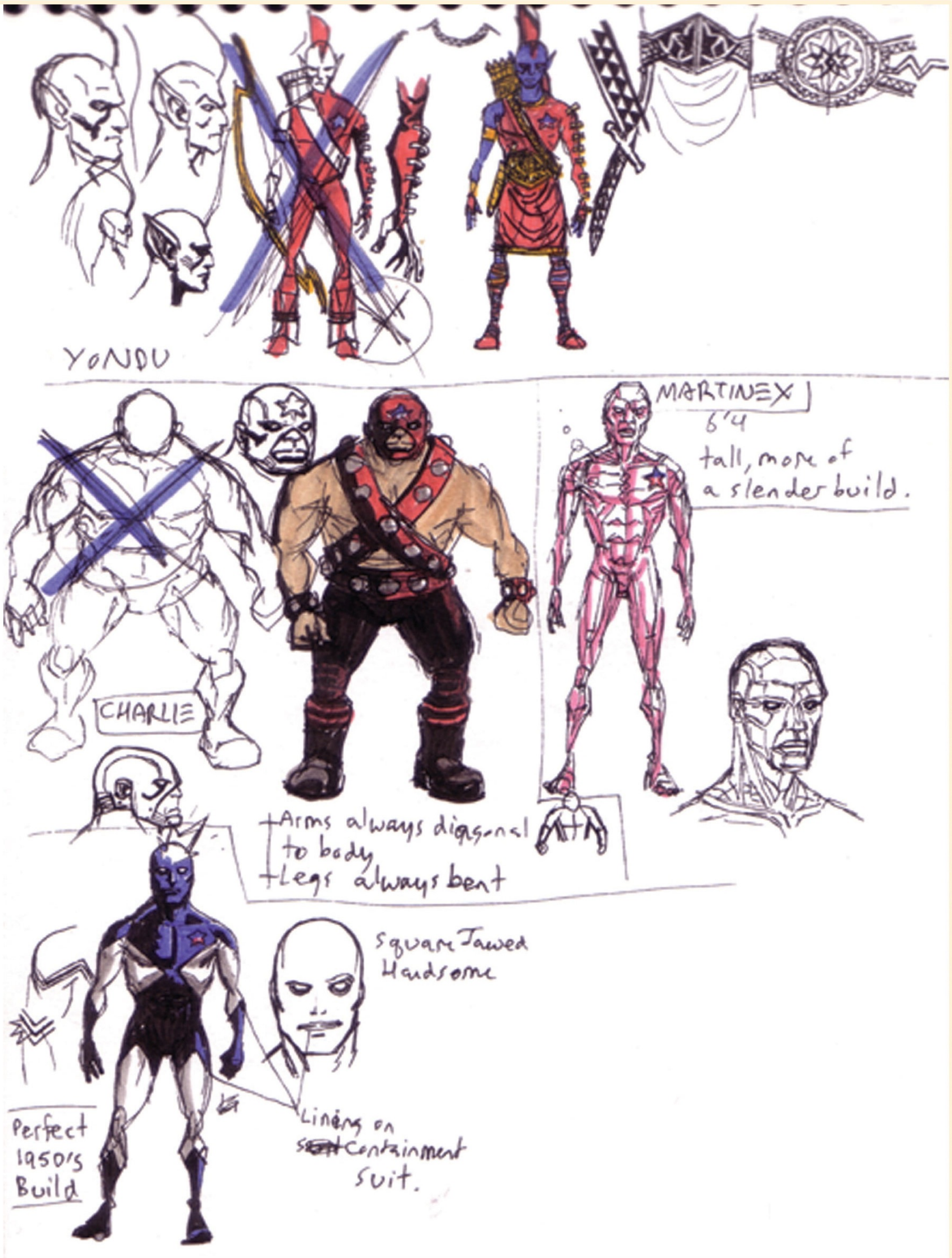
Frame variant complete art

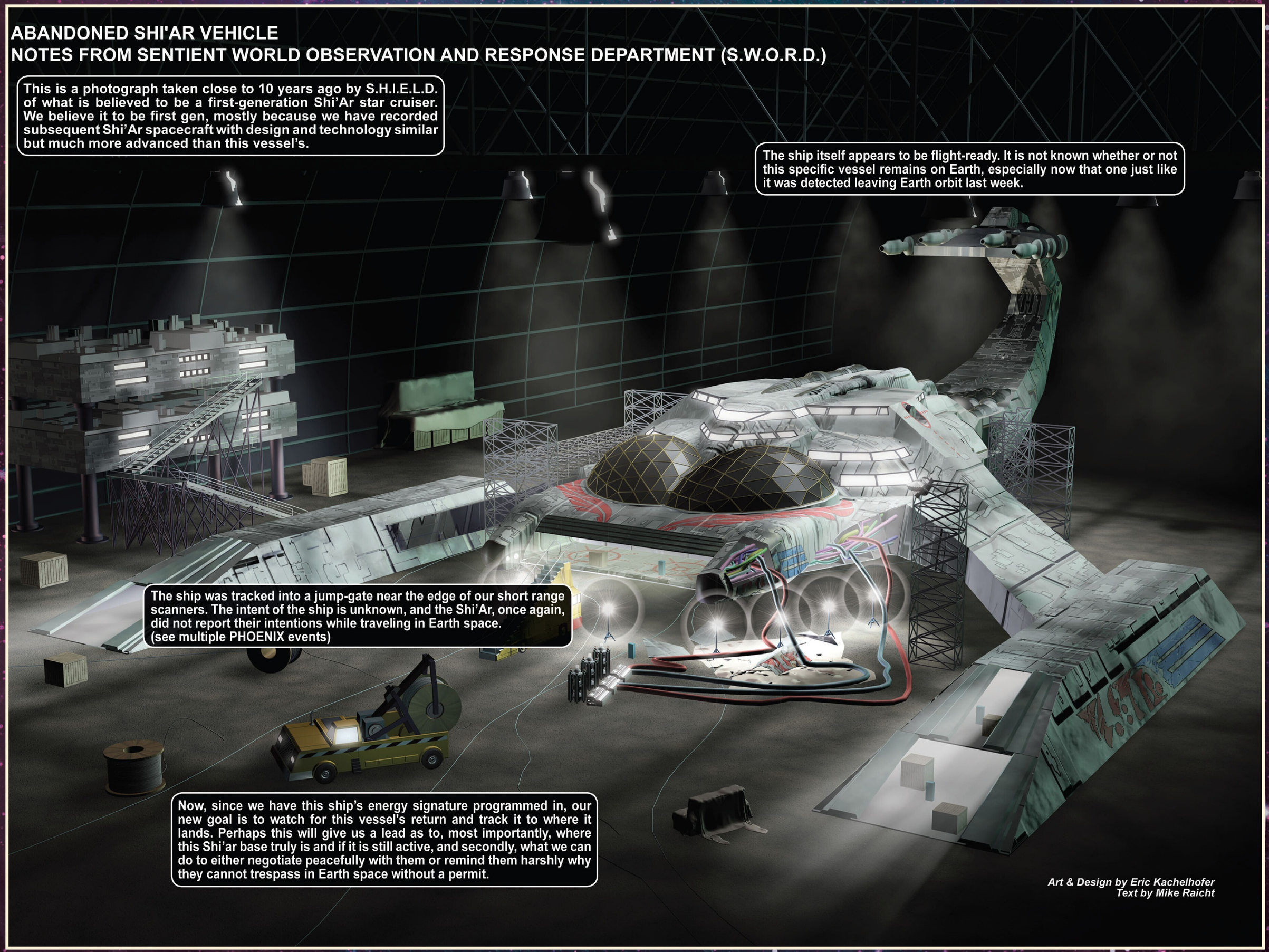
Guardians of the Galaxy character designs by WES CRAIG



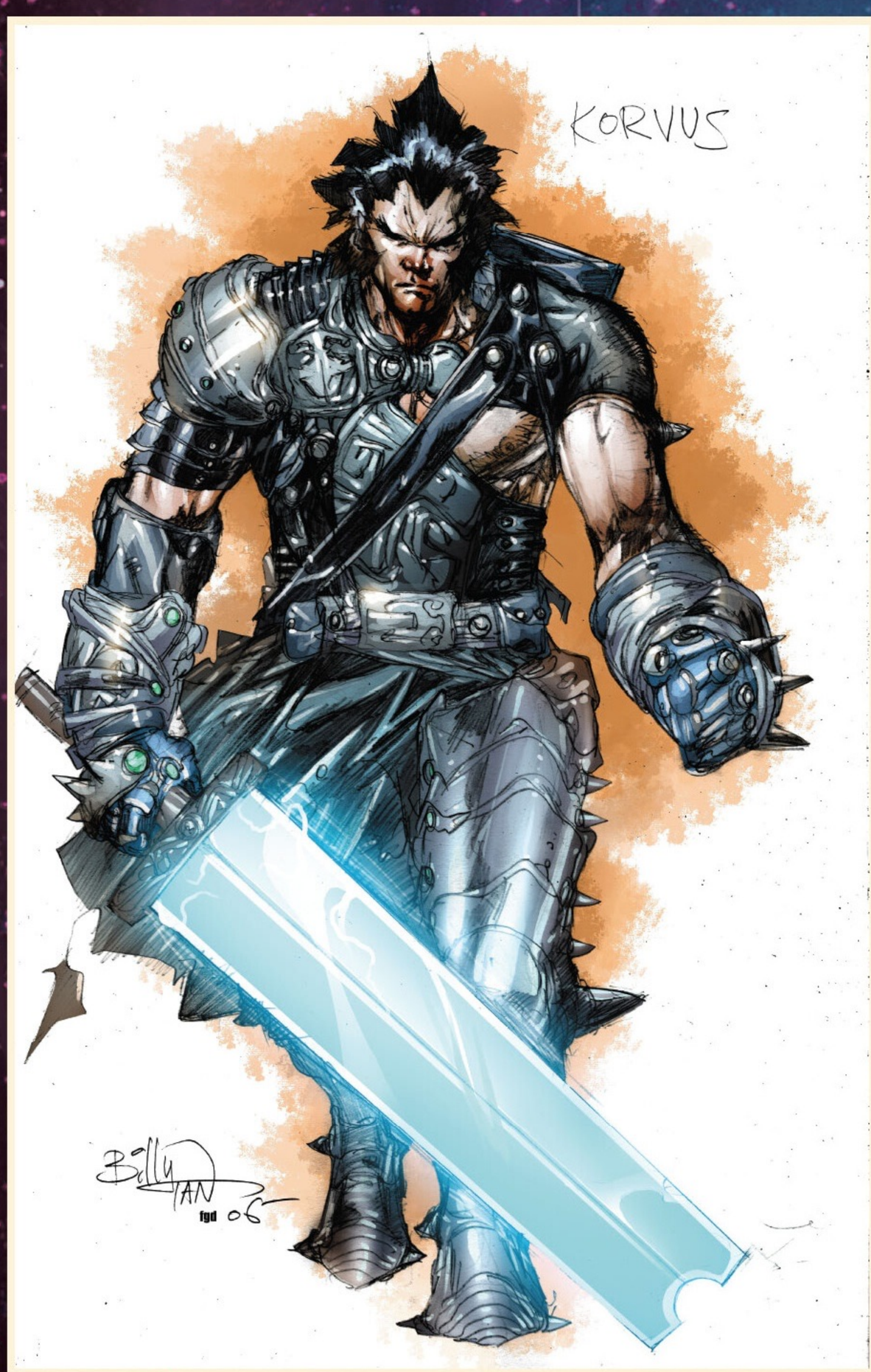
REF
gun holster
show extra flap
white stars
No side stripe
lower than other lords
fingers cut off
no flares
thin eye brows
broken nose
boots over pants (not socks)
A weathered Pulp Sci-fi Hero
thick eye brows
no wrinkle lines
he's handsome except that he's a bug.
Romp.
side burns
clef
starlike
extra big iris'
belt buckle
skin tight suit
under skirt
gloves over shirt
young-looking
no make-up
thin line features
makeshift stuff
CRAZY

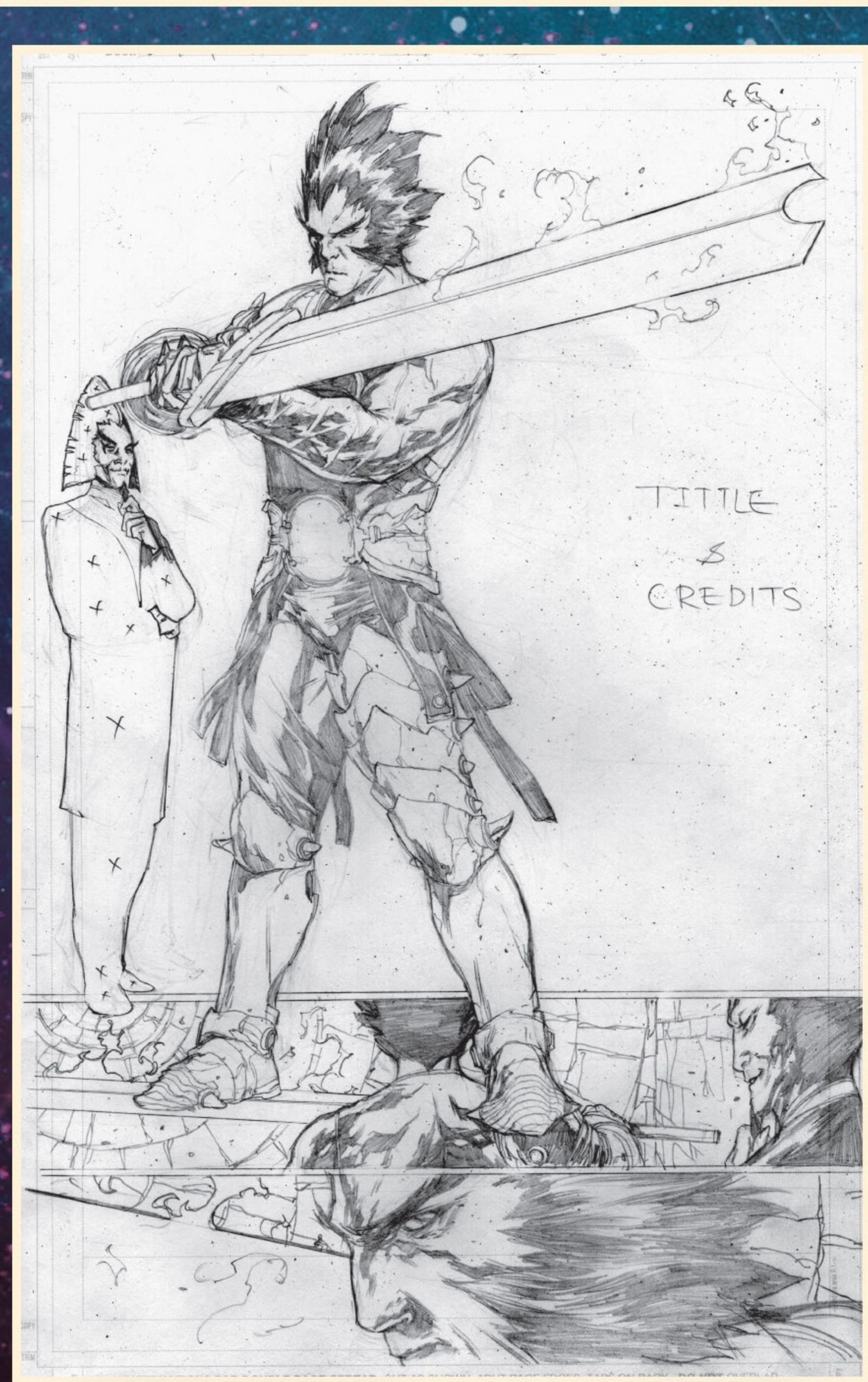

BADOON!
KING
SOLDIER
ALL VERY SNAKE LIKE!
serious curved spine
LongArms
King is more erect than soldiers (in his posture, that is)
No women!!!
tall
fat
more hunched


YONDU
CHARLIE
MARTINEX
6'4
tall, more of
a slender build.
+Arms always diagonal
to body
+Legs always bent
Square Jawed
Handsome
Perfect
1950's
Build
Lining on
Containment
Suit.

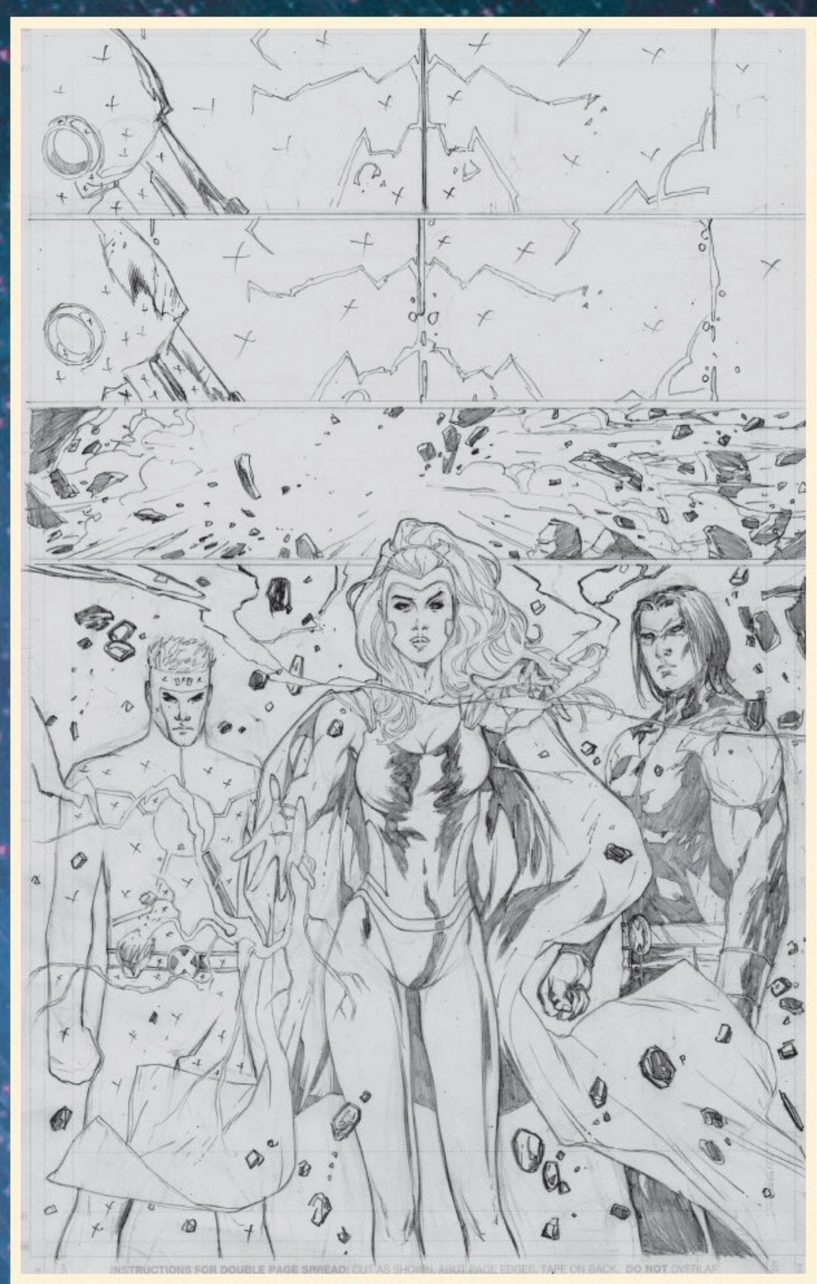

ABANDONED SHI'AR VEHICLE
NOTES FROM SENTIENT WORLD OBSERVATION AND RESPONSE DEPARTMENT (S.W.O.R.D.)
This is a photograph taken close to 10 years ago by S.H.I.E.L.D. of what is believed to be a first-generation Shi'Ar star cruiser. We believe it to be first gen, mostly because we have recorded subsequent Shi'Ar spacecraft with design and technology similar but much more advanced than this vessel's.
The ship itself appears to be flight-ready. It is not known whether or not this specific vessel remains on Earth, especially now that one just like it was detected leaving Earth orbit last week.
The ship was tracked into a jump-gate near the edge of our short range scanners. The intent of the ship is unknown, and the Shi'Ar, once again, did not report their intentions while traveling in Earth space. (see multiple PHOENIX events)
Now, since we have this ship's energy signature programmed in, our new goal is to watch for this vessel's return and track it to where it lands. Perhaps this will give us a lead as to, most importantly, where this Shi'ar base truly is and if it is still active, and secondly, what we can do to either negotiate peacefully with them or remind them harshly why they cannot trespass in Earth space without a permit.
Art & Design by Eric Kachelhofer
Text by Mike Raicht

X-Men character designs by BILLY TAN





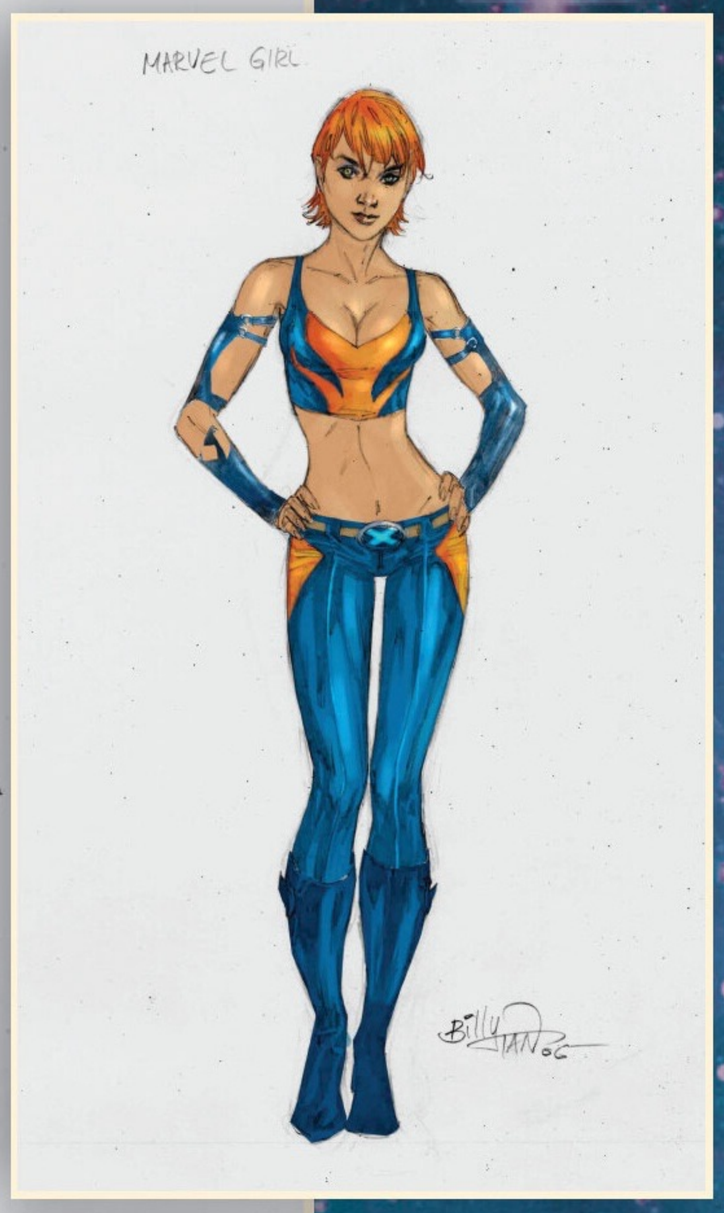
UNCANNY X-MEN #479, page 3 pencils by BILLY TAN

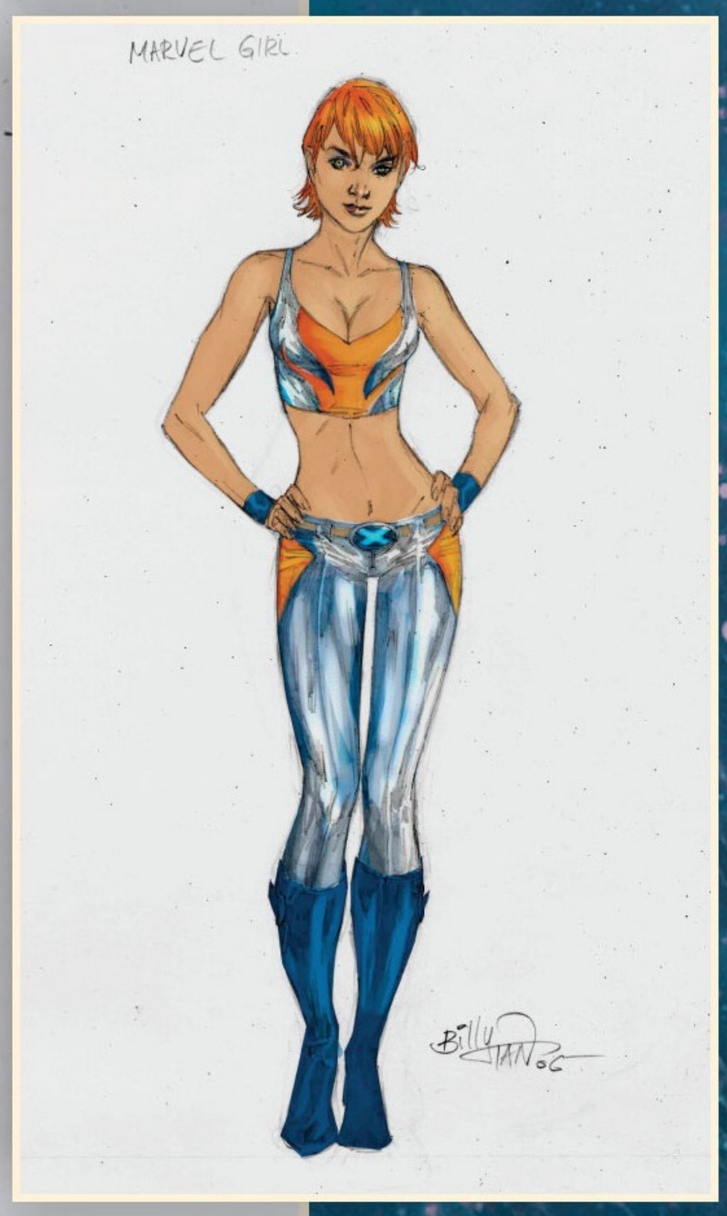


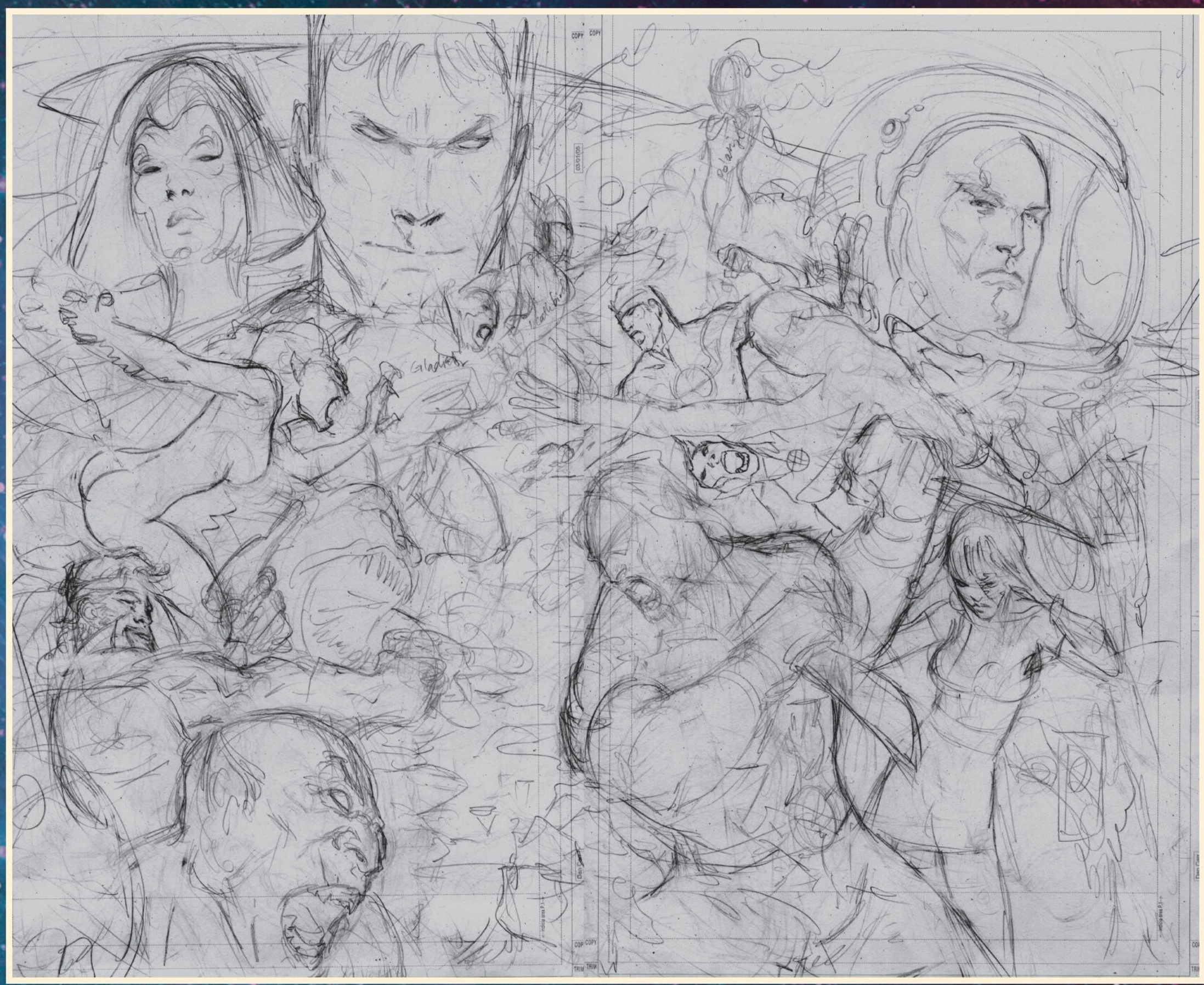
Uncanny X-Men #476, page 1
pencils by BILLY TAN

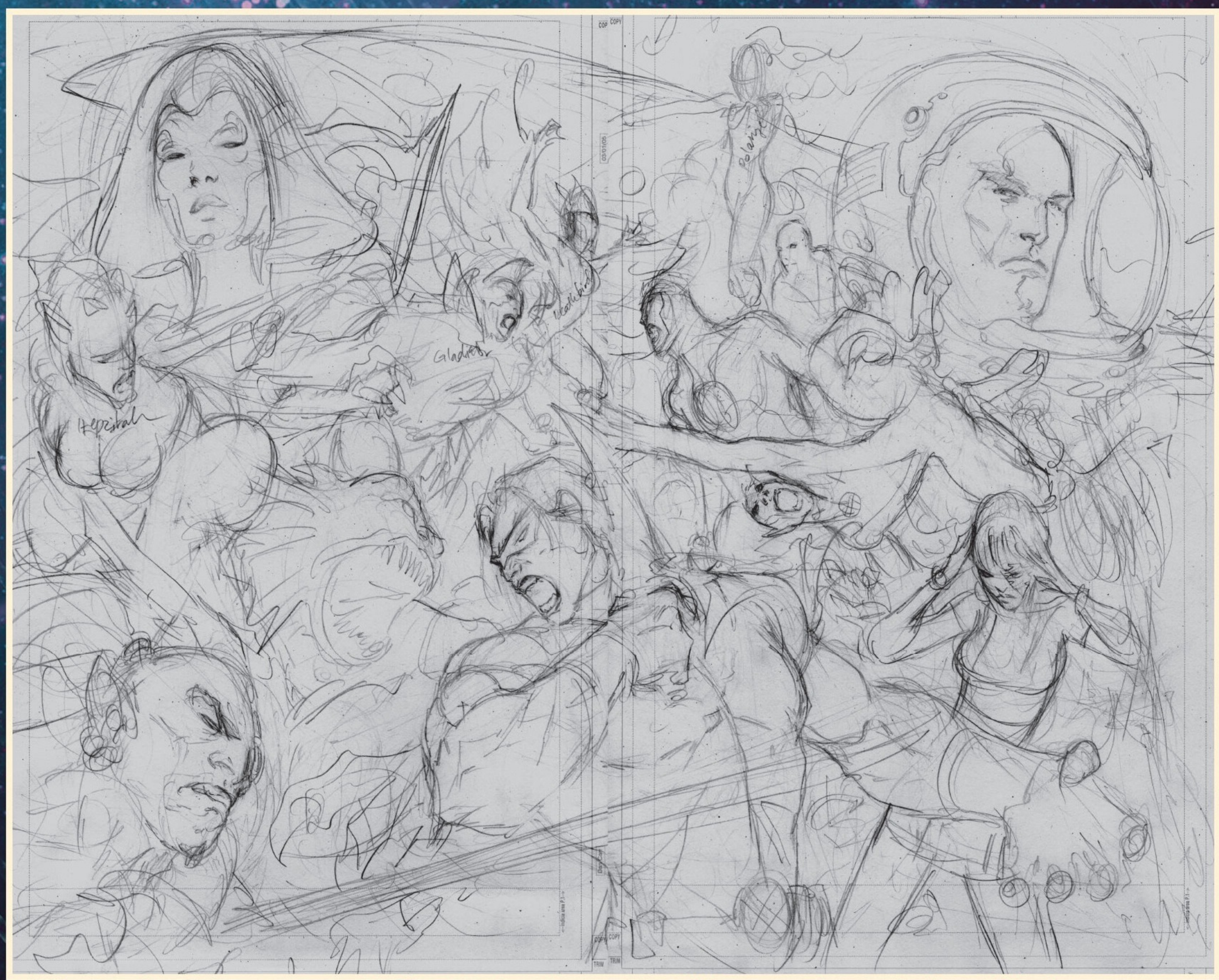
Uncanny X-Men #481, page 10
pencils by BILLY TAN

MARVEL GIRL

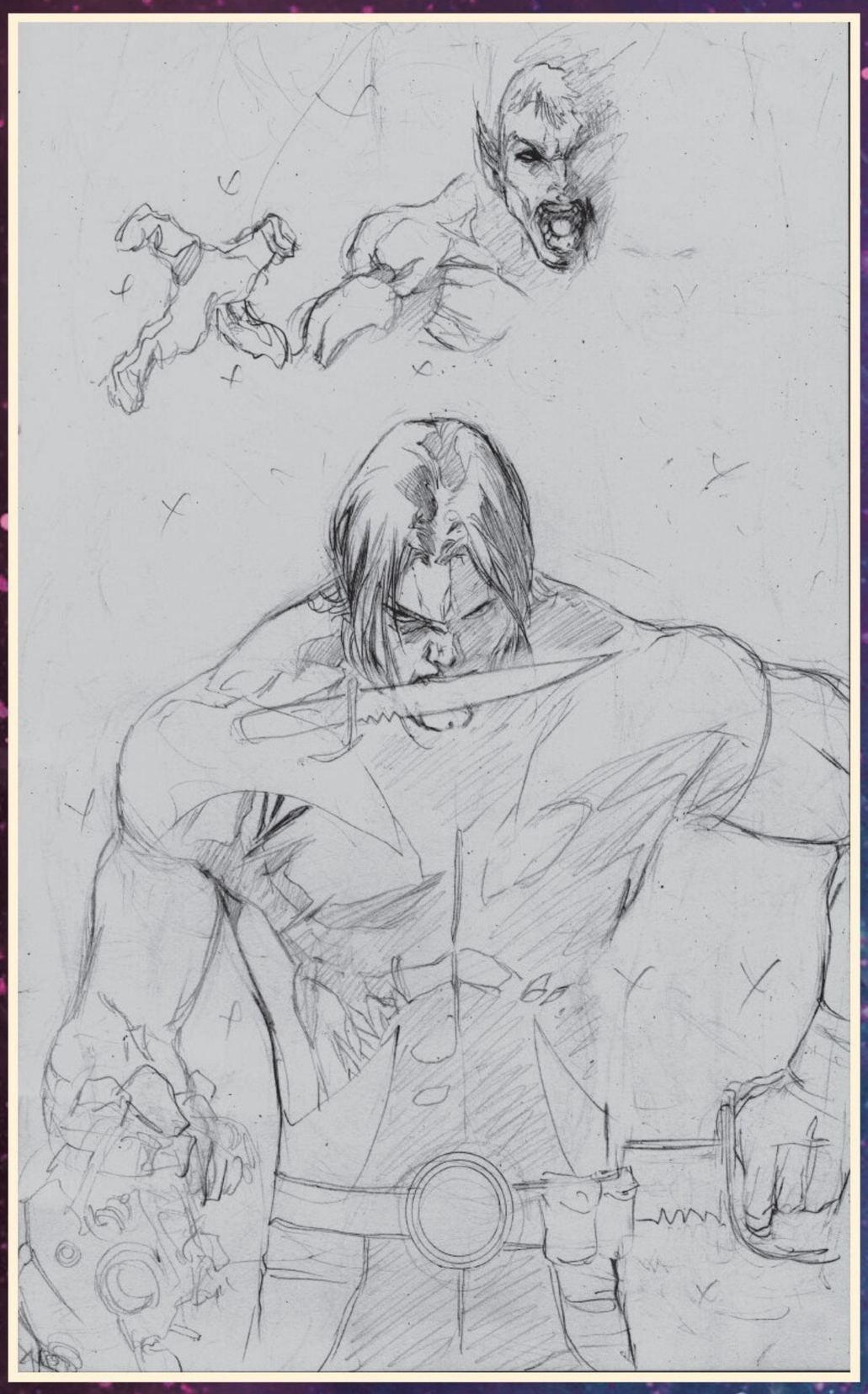


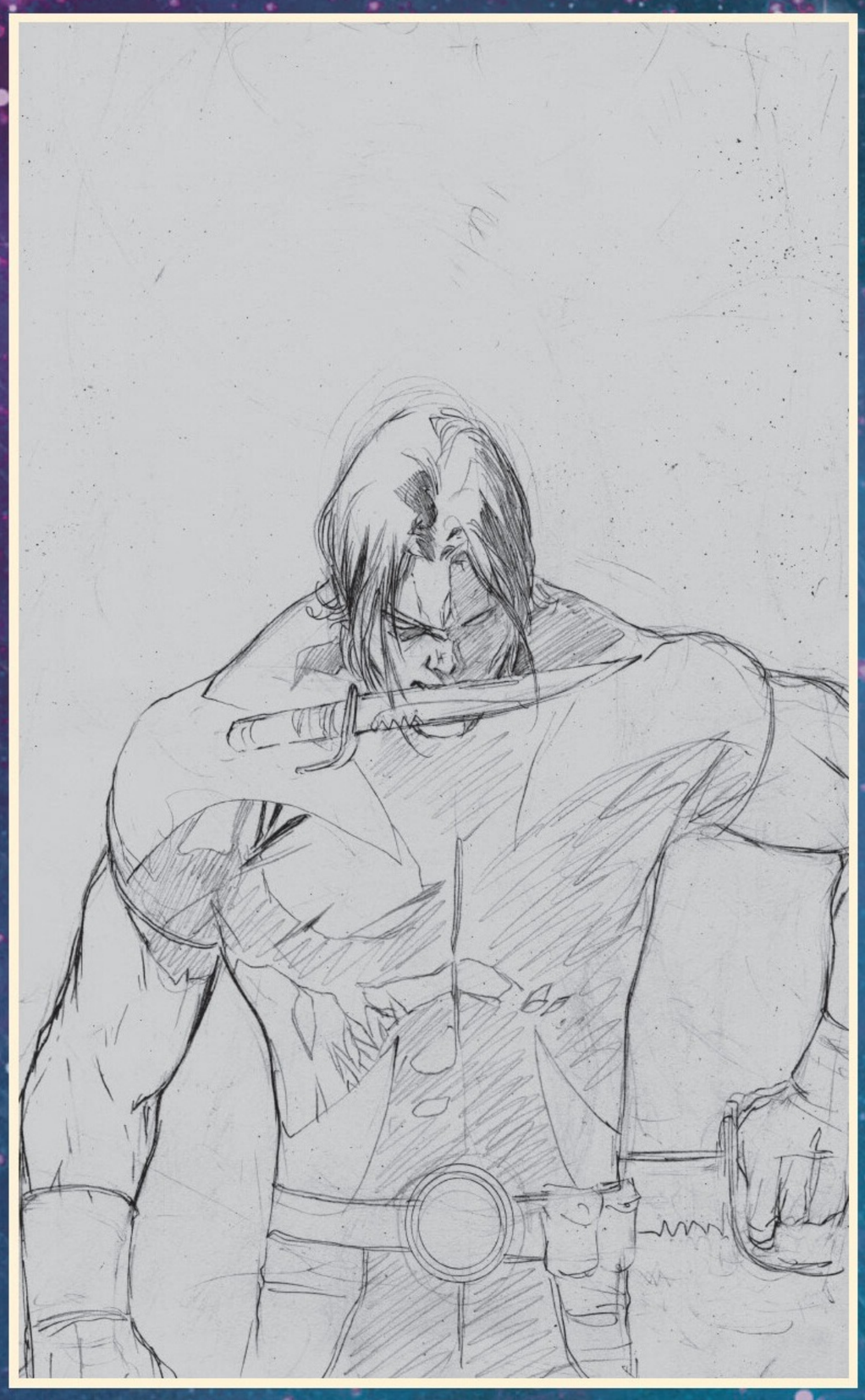




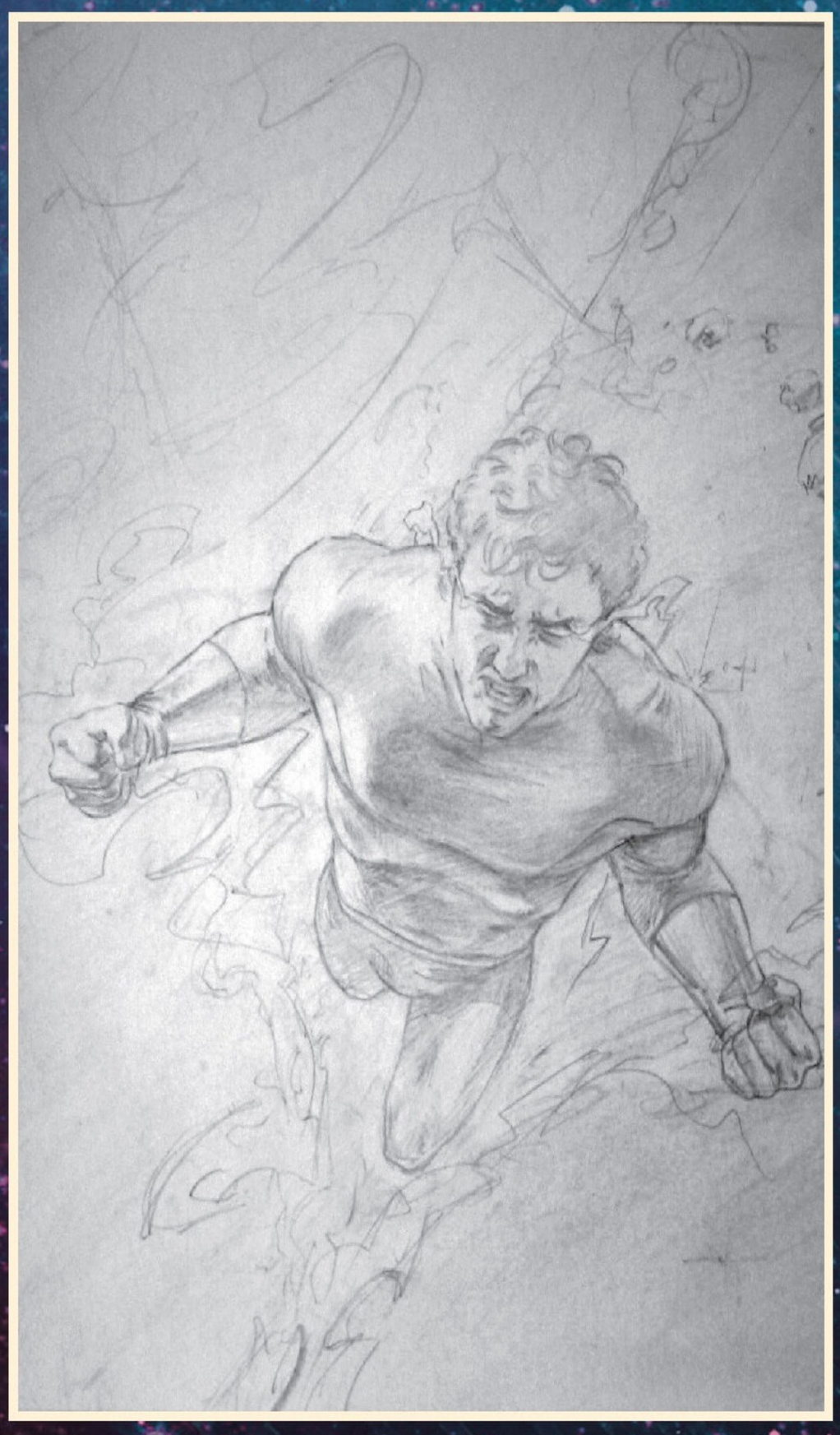


Uncanny X-Men #475 cover sketches by BILLY TAN

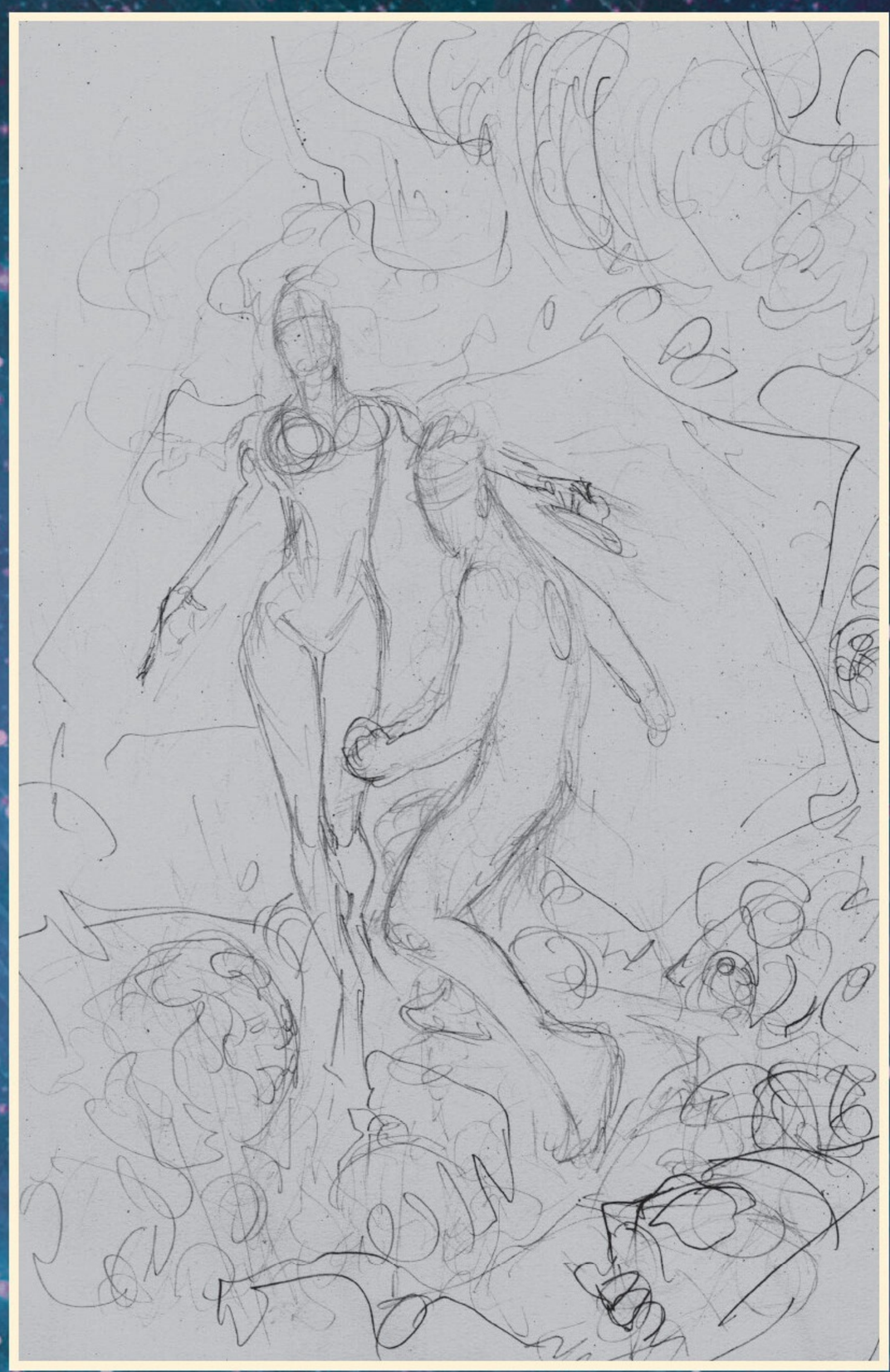




UNCANNY X-MEN #476 cover sketches by BILLY TAN

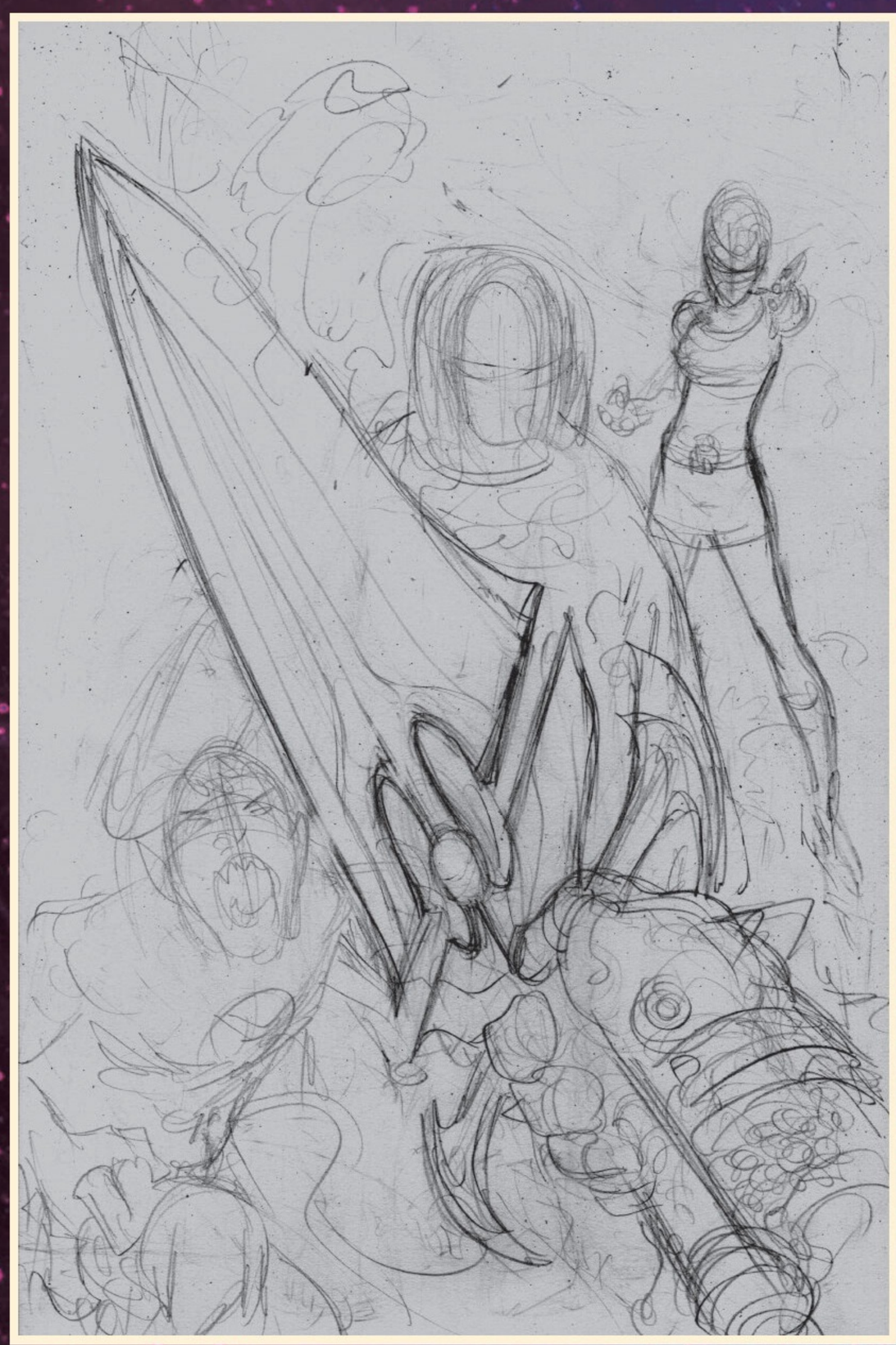


UNCANNY X-MEN #477 cover sketchs and pencils by JOHN WATSON

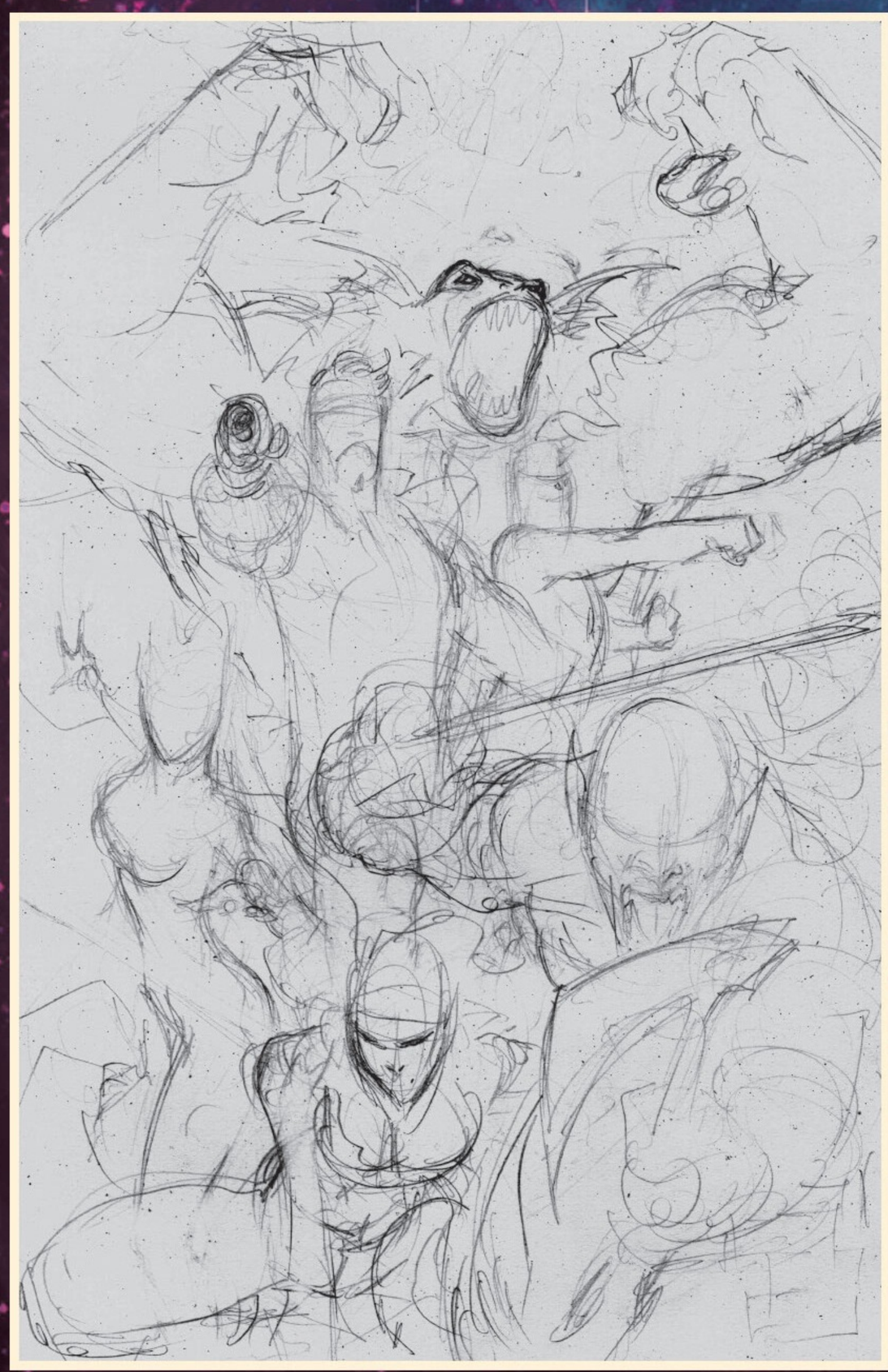


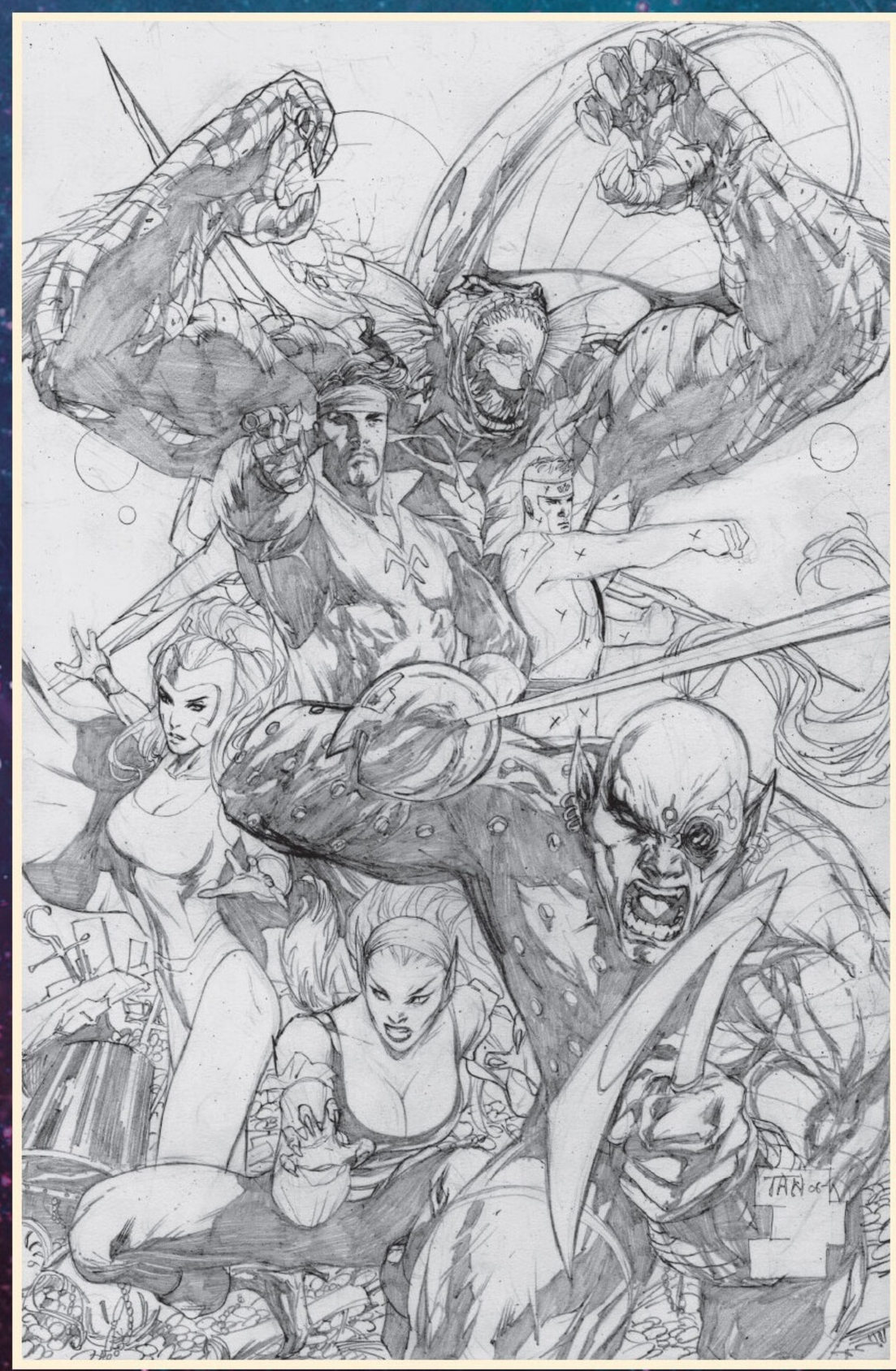
UNCANNY X-MEN #478 cover sketches and pencils by BILLY TAN

UNCANNY X-MEN #479 cover sketches and pencils by BILLY TAN

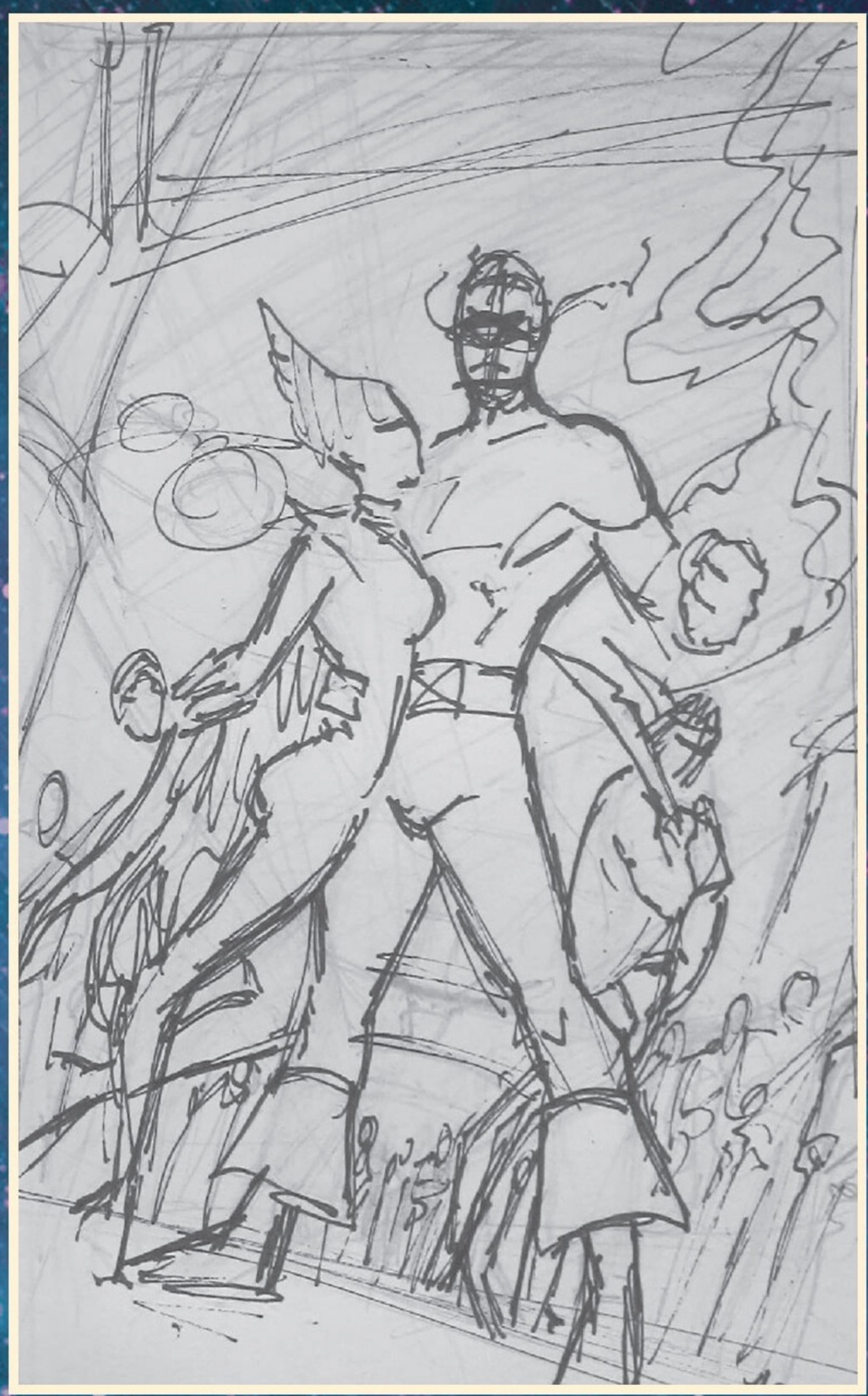


UNCANNY X-MEN #479 cover sketches by BILLY TAN



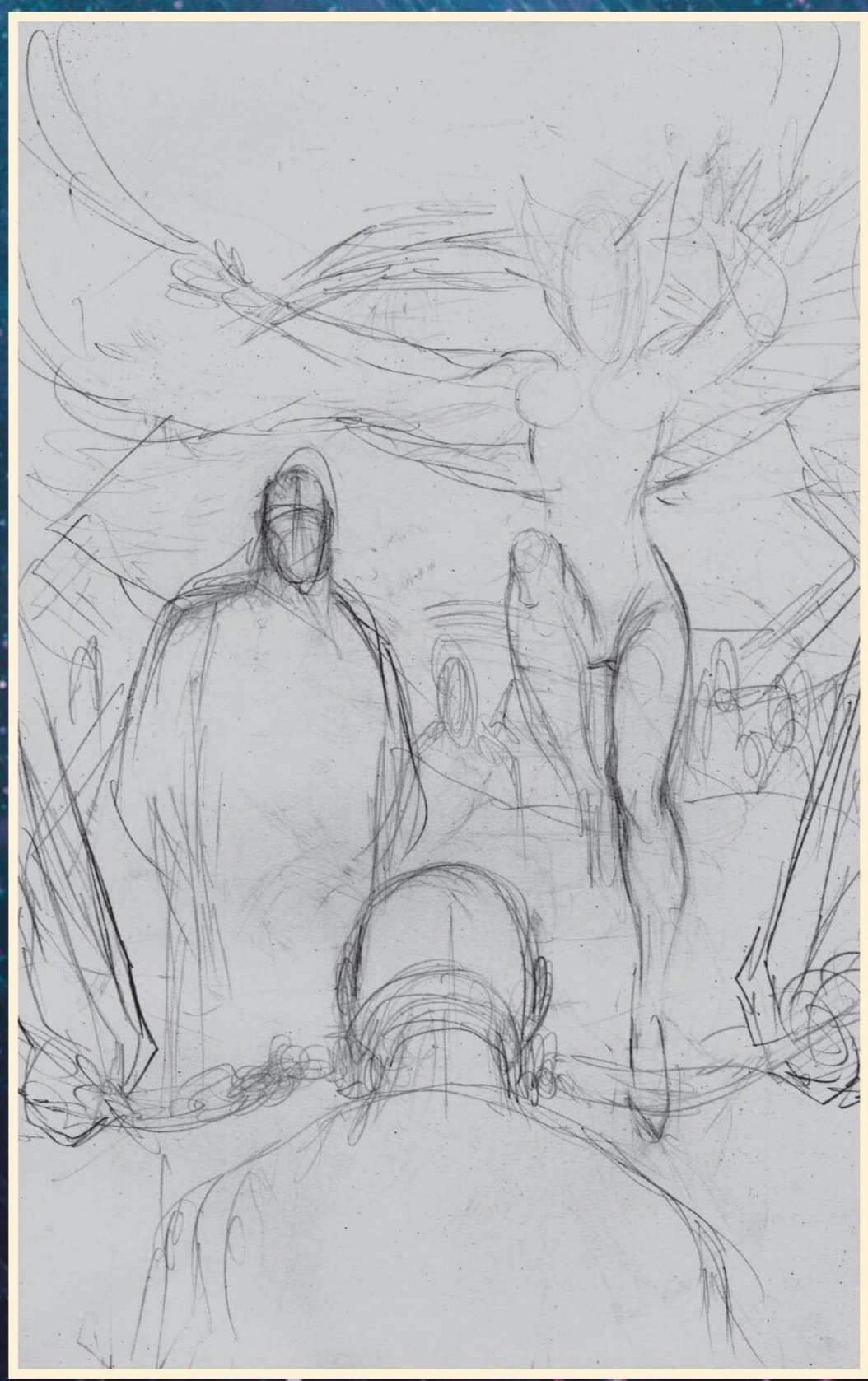


UNCANNY X-MEN #482 cover sketches and pencils by BILLY TAN

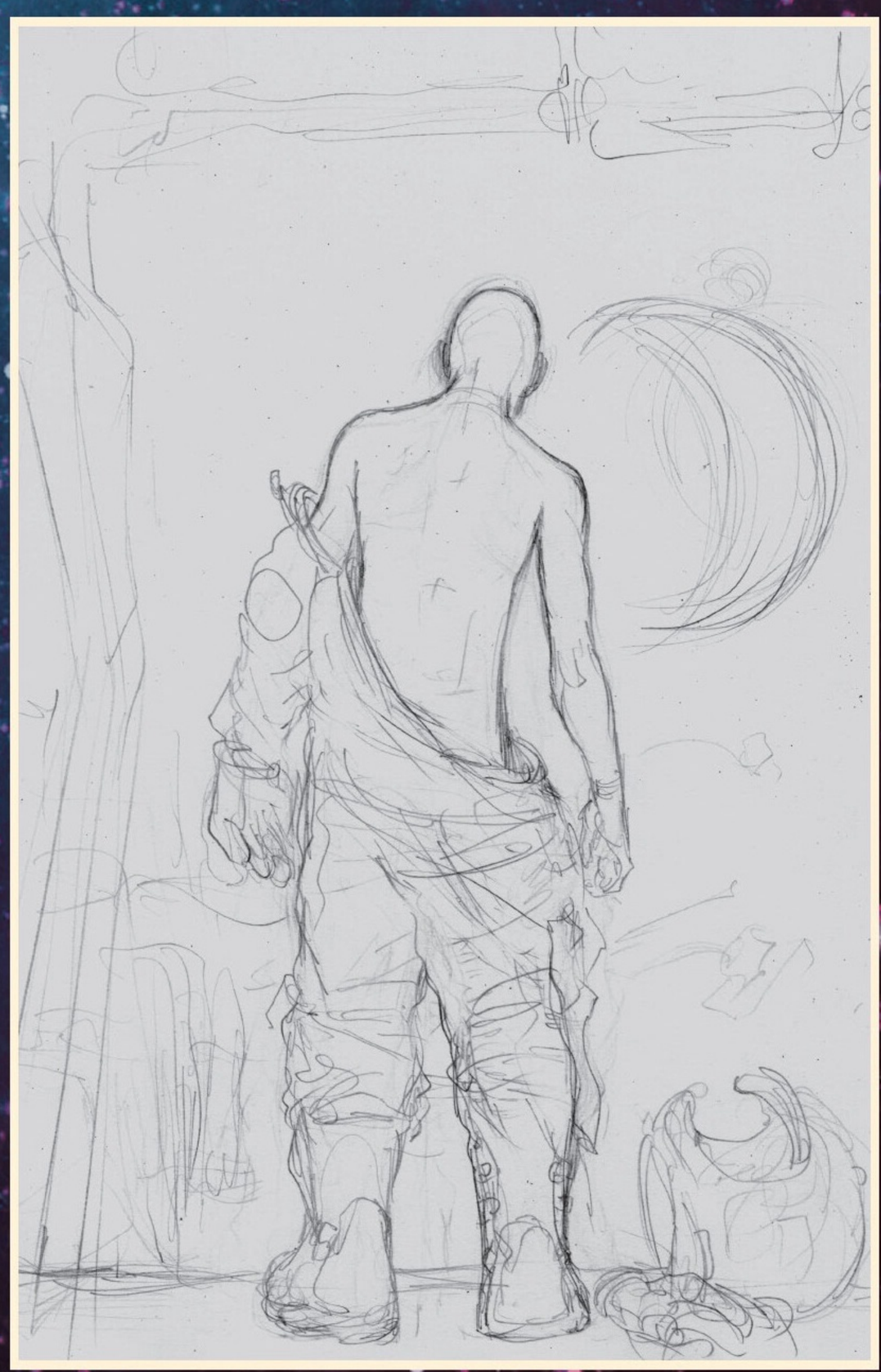


UNCANNY X-MEN #483 cover sketch by BILLY TAN

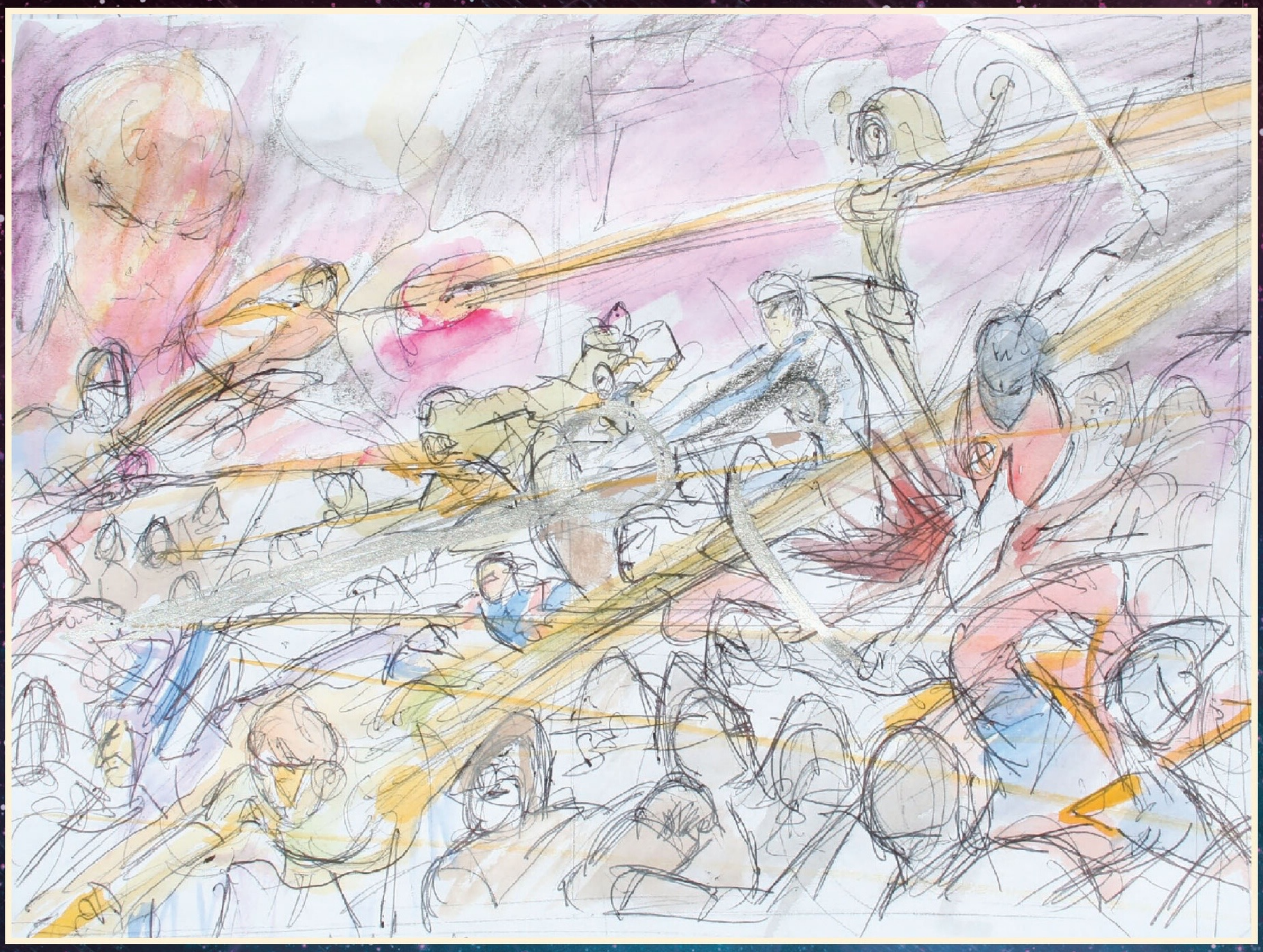
UNCANNY X-MEN #484 cover sketch by BILLY TAN



UNCANNY X-MEN #485 cover sketch by BILLY TAN



unsed cover sketch by BILLY TAN



UNCANNY X-MEN #486 cover sketch by JOHN WATSON

A COSMIC CONFLICT SO HUGE IT ENGULFS THE INHUMANS, THE X-MEN AND THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY!

Inhuman monarch Black Bolt leads his people away from Earth to seize his destiny as ruler of the Kree Empire! But Vulcan, the power-mad brother of Cyclops and Havok, has also set his sights on the stars. And when he claims the throne of the Shi'ar Empire, the Marvel Universe will once again be rocked by intergalactic war — this time between a king and an emperor! As these two titans clash, the Nova Corps, Starjammers, Guardians of the Galaxy and more will be caught in the middle. And by the time the battle is over, the fallout might just tear the galaxy apart!

Collecting *Uncanny X-Men (1981) #475-486, X-Men: Emperor Vulcan #1-5, Secret Invasion: War of Kings, X-Men: Kingbreaker #1-4, War of Kings: Darkhawk #1-2, War of Kings: Warriors #1-2, War of Kings #1-6, War of Kings: Ascension #1-4, War of Kings: Savage World of Sakaar, Nova (2007) #23-28, Guardians of the Galaxy (2008) #13-19, War of Kings: Who Will Rule?, Marvel Spotlight: War of Kings* and material from *X-Men: Divided We Stand #2.*

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MARVEL